De Stijl 1917-1931

The Dutch Contribution to Modern Art

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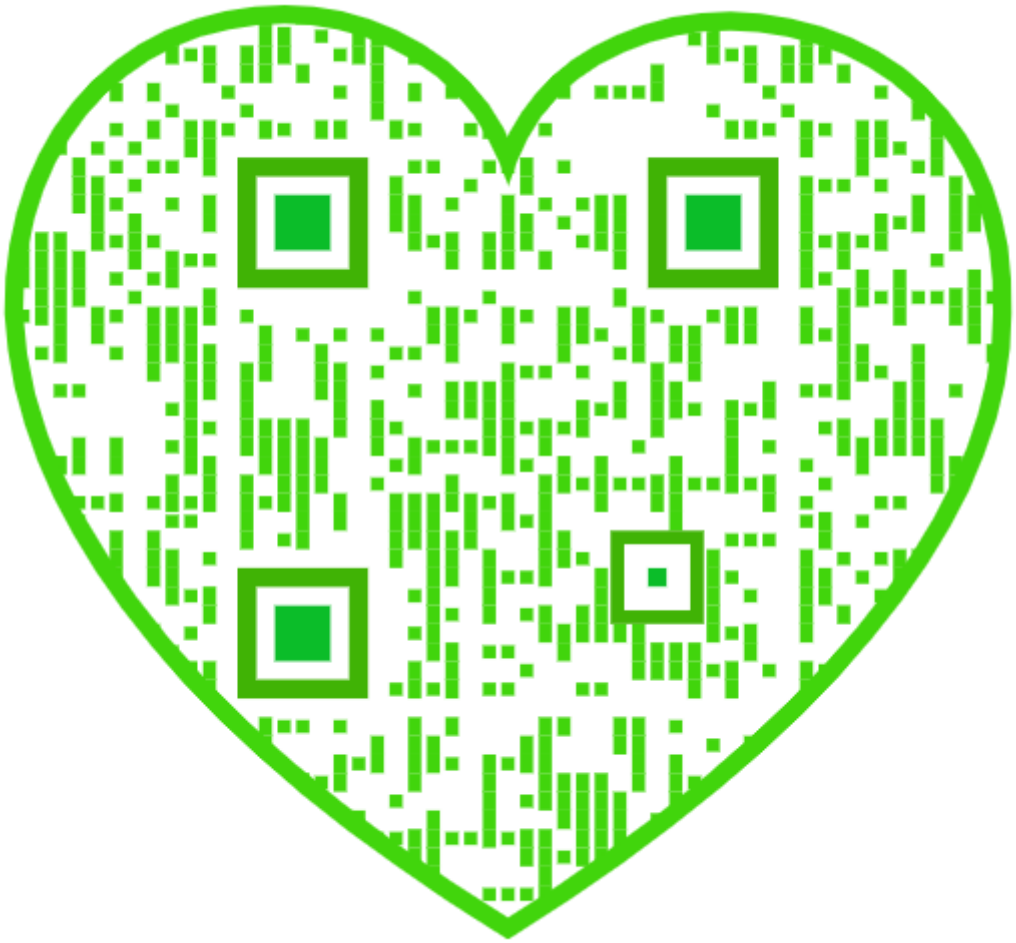

voorwoord

Een dissertatie, vele jaren na de beëindiging der universitaire studie geschreven, biedt veelal niet de gelegenheid de dankbaarheid te laten blijken, die de schrijver voor zijn academische leraren gevoelt.

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1 introduction

While I was collecting the material for this study on ‘De Stijl’, which I herewith submit to the reader's kind consideration, I found myself confronted by the problem of the ‘historia hodierna’ of the fine arts. How should the art historian treat a subject which belongs by no means to the past, but is still a part of the present? And, as a further complication, how should the art historian characterize-and do justice to-a modern trend which makes a peremptory claim to absolute validity?

While selecting the material and the quotations, I happened to run across a passage in J.J.P. Oud's article on Dutch architecture that proved to be of great help. ‘Though the importance of a work of art can only be judged from an absolute point of view, the significance of an act can only be appreciated according to a relative standard’.[1] Since one of the founders of ‘De Stijl’ gives me this clue, I feel entitled to work according to this method.

In dealing with ‘De Stijl’ we are faced with both the aspects mentioned by Oud: the importance of works of art, i.e. their aesthetic quality, and the signif-

icance of an act, of an historical fact: the rise and development of an artistic movement which in its results happens to be identical with these works of art. And it will sometimes be difficult to separate these two aspects because the first manifestations of the historical fact are the very works of art which have to be appreciated by different standards.

But still, Oud's remark remains valid. And it has moulded the form of this study. The importance of a work of art, its quality, cannot be explained or accounted for by art history or by any other scientific means. The work of the man of genius can be discerned as such by art history-the rest should be silence and wordless admiration. But the appearance of a work of art, its style, can and should be elucidated by art history. There, more than anywhere else, lies the task of art history and in this task the 'historia hodierna' is included.

Art history in its present stage and after having passed through a period of descriptive cataloguing of phenomena, is now mainly concerned with one ever recurring question: the research into the reason of artistic expression, into the conditions under which the several styles were able to develop in the course of time. As to this latter problem, contemporary history of art supplies the scholar with a wider field of experience, even when knowledge is sometimes obscured by a lack of historical perspective. But anyhow, we know a lot more about our own century, about its complicated pattern of human activities, than we do about the- perhaps far more simple-circumstances of, for instance, the Middle Ages or the Renaissance. We are able to question witnesses in the different fields of activity and include their testimony, distorted or otherwise, in the material of our survey, based on a research in chronological order of the established facts.

This research cannot be confined to the domain of the arts. The recent results of psychology and of historical science will point with increasing insistence to the fact that the artist's work is principally a social activity. Therefore the artist has to be considered as a member of society and more specifically as a member of an existing and closely defined group of society. A century ago, Hyppolite Taine formulated this complex but exact method when he wrote 'L'oeuvre d'art est déterminée par un ensemble qui est l'état général de l'esprit et des moeurs environnantes.'[2] A form of art history, based exclusively on the so-called or alleged autonomous development of the arts, can therefore account for influences; it enables us to establish the relations between masters and pupils, but it will but seldom reveal the reasons for a new trend, a renewal in art. On the other hand, all research into the field of contemporary art history should start with an account of the technical progress of art before the period under discussion. It has to define the borderline from which a new group or an individual artist launches his discoveries into territory, hitherto unknown or insufficiently explored. The starting point of these explorations will always determine the direction of these travels. The development of 'De Stijl' would be hard to explain without the evidence offered by the transformations in the field of art during the latter half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, from Cézanne onwards.

Though ‘De Stijl’ prides itself on being a logical consequence of the previous development of the arts, it has a pronounced ideological character, which cannot be accounted for without investigating the adjacent planes of cultural activity. Contemporary philosophy deeply influenced the artists which founded ‘De Stijl’. The universalism of the movement, the new and quite different scope they have claimed for their art can, up to a certain point be traced to certain trends in Dutch philosophy during the first years of the 20th century. And though this could not be easily demonstrated in the resultant paintings, positive proof can nevertheless be obtained from the written explanations.

One of the terms for which ‘De Stijl’ artists show a certain preference in their articles, is ‘the common consciousness of the period’. This consciousness is a direct result of the conditions of the period, they cannot therefore be neglected in this study as they are conditions of a different aspect and of varying importance. In more than one respect ‘De Stijl’ bears the stamp of its period, perhaps even more than it shows the influence of its predecessors. The nature of our research is best described by altering a quotation from Marx: ‘Photography and the technique of reproduction were revolutionaries of a character, considerably more dangerous than the painters Cézanne, Gauguin and others.’[3] New facts, inventions and discoveries have contributed more to the origin of the common consciousness of the period than any individual artist or thinker could have done. In order to understand the rise and development of ‘De Stijl’, we have therefore to investigate the period of its birth and growth, i.e. the social and economic pattern which, to a great extent shaped the consciousness of this group.

It would however, be insufficient to restrict our investigations to a survey of ‘De Stijl's’ period and its social condition. ‘De Stijl’, though an obvious manifestation of its time, is even more obviously the vivid expression of its national entourage with its inherent traditions. I am well aware of the fact that ‘De Stijl’ was intended by its members and in all its manifestations as a universal movement, international in spirit, constantly striving to abolish all such limitations as are imposed by geographical conditions. Nevertheless, ‘De Stijl’ appears to be deeply rooted in the traditions and the characteristics of its native Netherlands. The first decade of the 20th century witnessed the rise of abstract art together with its theoretical justification. But now that nearly half a century has elapsed, we are as amazed by the coinciding, mutually independent currents in this new trend in art, as we are intrigued by the profound differences between them. ‘De Stijl’ was born in the Netherlands and bears all the marks of what Huizinga has so neatly characterized as the ‘Nederlands geestesmerk’, (the spiritual trademark of the Netherlands).

These characteristics do not belong entirely to a given historical period; whereas one century may stress this aspect, another period will accentuate that. ‘Nederlands geestesmerk’ has been moulded by the country's shape and essence, by its social pattern and religious trends. It is made visible and audible and thus brought to greater consciousness by its painters, poets and philosophers. ‘De Stijl’ may be accepted as the contemporary manifestation of the state the mental

and moral attitude had attained during the first world war and shortly after it. No doubt the contemporary attitude, in other countries and in all of Western Europe, greatly influenced ‘De Stijl’, but there are too many facts which are inherently Dutch to make us believe that Dutch traditions, that ‘Nederlands geestesmerk’ may be neglected when investigating the specific conditions which account for the birth and the growth of ‘De Stijl’.

Thus, after having tried to uncover the roots of ‘De Stijl’ and made an attempt at proving it to be the Dutch contribution to modern art, we shall have to concentrate on the special qualities of its work, on the peculiarities of its ideas and creations. We are sufficiently aware of the fact that it would seem a contradiction to speak of ‘peculiarities’, where ‘De Stijl’ has constantly fought for the abolition of form in particular. Nonetheless we must approach ‘De Stijl’ as being a phenomenon and, though the phenomenon claims to be universal in its kind, our method in approaching it will have to be strictly individual. Yet when we endeavour to present a survey of ‘De Stijl's’ characteristics and do them full justice, we have to make it quite clear that it is not only an artistic movement, not only a trend in modern and, more especially, in abstract art, but that it is mainly and principally a new attitude towards life and society. We can in this context base our investigations to a large extent on the articles published in the periodical *De Stijl*, in which the various members of the group expounded the programme they had established in the course of their collaboration. In doing so, they have created a terminology of their own, very difficult to translate into any other language: even the Dutch reader, unless he is an initiale will find it very confusing.

‘De Stijl’, on its first appearance and in its first manifestations presented itself as an artistic, as an aesthetical movement. It had done away with every representation of nature and confined itself to the elementary means of plastic expression: vertical and horizontal lines and primary colours: yellow, blue, red and no-colours: white, black and grey. Thus we are concerned with a new fact, manifested in a series of paintings - and with a new programme. We shall have to deal with these two newcomers and all their implications. First of all there is the theory of the aesthetics of pure art which must be investigated. This theory in its turn is based on a hypothesis: the development of abstract art as a continuous and logical evolution through the various intermediate stages, from the 19th Century realists onwards. The autonomy of all plastic arts is asserted by the writers in *De Stijl* and from this fact they draw conclusions which are important to their work and their ambitions, aesthetic and otherwise. In this manner they claim that their art is inevitable and necessary and they find one of the bases of their further programme in this fact. They characterize their work and ambition as an urge to purify and liberate art from various secondary and obnoxious attributes such as subject matter, inaccuracy, obscurity and, above all, individual, merely casual emotion. This purification, which had already been begun by the Impressionists and was thence carried on by the subsequent schools

of modern painting, reached its climax and its end in ‘De Stijl’, in Neo-Plasticism, (Nieuwe Beelding). This purification marks the commencement of ‘De Stijl’ it is the basis on which it ia to develop its entire further progress. It must therefore be dealt with first.

This huge effort, aiming at the total purification of the plastic arts from mere accidentals is decidedly not negative only in its intentions. By stripping the arts from all casual attributes, ‘De Stijl’ aims at the realization of a universal law and a universal spirit. It aims at exteriorizing by means of pure plastic expression the equally pure harmony which man claimed to have found in all the laws and principles of the cosmos. It therefore attempts to render visible and subject to contemplation something very close to the platonic idea. In its striving after abstraction, after the liberation of the arts from all accidentals, ‘De Stijl’ constantly aims at the visible expression of the universal principle which its members consider the rendering of exact and equilibrated relations. This is the central, the positive thesis of their programme and it requires to be explained because all that follows after, emanates from it.

Universalism, the balance of equivalent relations has been realized by purified plastic means of expression in the work of ‘De Stijl’. This realization, which was accomplished in the very first year of ‘De Stijl's’ existence inspired the artists with a hitherto unknown confidence in the future consequence of their movement and their endeavours. It shaped ‘De Stijl’, making it a movement which, when it spread beyond the borders of artistic creation, felt itself compelled to apply the new-found truths to all other forms of human activity.

This is the source of one side of ‘De Stijl's’ development: its utopian character. Art, in complete freedom and detachment has realized or has come as close as possible to universal equilibrium. Art had to serve as a paradigm and the products of abstract art, of neo-plasticism could demonstrate and teach humanity how to realize this same harmony by abolishing all particular form, by evicting all individual, casual and secondary incidentals, in the most convincing way. In accordance with its fundamentally Dutch origin, ‘De Stijl’ readily turns an aesthetic result into an ethical principle. Society, both contemporary and local, moulded ‘De Stijl’ but, on the other hand, ‘DeStijl’ claims to build a new reality on the base of its spiritual discoveries. Its utopian character and its place in contemporary life must therefore be investigated.

The ultimate consequences of its universal ambitions were formulated by ‘De Stijl’ in its programme of utopian desiderata. A new life, a new reality was to arise, according to the universal principles which the painters of ‘De Stijl’ had rendered completely visible for the first time in history. But not all of ‘De Stijl's’ efforts were concentrated on a utopian, remote future. The purification of the plastic means of expression, should also serve to solve various actual problems of our present time. The pure means of expression could, in the first place, create a clear and universally current plastic language. This means that they were able to launch a style into present-day life, a style capable of expressing the lucid tidiness which our century seems to demand. It would have to be a style, universally valid, its expression the essence of our time, because it would

do away with all the remnants of misunderstood baroque, which we have come to detest so wholeheartedly.

The inclusion of ‘De Stijl's’ principles in to-day's reality is the last item which has to be dealt with in this study. The creation of a style which would not be an untimely paradigm for a utopian reality, but an expression heralding an as yet unrecognized character of our epoch, was the aim of still another trend within ‘De Stijl’. And, as it was fit for immediate inclusion, it has since been manifested in various fields of artistic reality. ‘De Stijl’ architecture is perhaps the most convincing and the most conspicuous proof of the ability of ‘De Stijl’ to realize its principles in modern life and to produce a language of forms which, in many respects, expresses the ‘common consciousness of our period’.

The principles and the moral creed of ‘De Stijl’ have to be dealt with in a special chapter, which will simplify matters as we have to bring the different aspects of ‘De Stijl’ under different headings. This methodical subdividing of ‘De Stijl's’ activities and ambitions does not prevent a constant and fruitful interplay of the different trends. Though the different aspects are more or less linked up with the various members of ‘De Stijl’, there has been a continual interrelation. This is the reason why no names have been mentioned up to this moment, though their different approach to the various problems will have to be demonstrated by means of the several members of the group. Still ‘De Stijl’ maintained its universal and anti-individualist principles even in internal collaboration and ‘De Stijl's’ manifestoes are very much the result of a collective activity. And, when viewed from across a quarter of a century, ‘De Stijl’ still remains the collective and united effort of its members.

In this way, after having attempted to characterize the principles and the aspirations of ‘De Stijl’, this study will later have to try to determine its influence on modern art and on the ‘common consciousness of time’. It is amazing to realize the expansion of ‘De Stijl's’ influence, although the movement, originating in a small country existed as such for hardly more than fifteen years. In an issue on the occasion of its tenth anniversary, *De Stijl* draws attention to this influence. It continued to increase after 1927. Every field of artistic activity seems to have been inspired by ‘DeStijl's’ dynamic and purifying attitude. Architecture in the first place bears the marks of ‘De Stijl’ and no wonder, for a series of daring and revolutionary projects had already been realized by the group. But its influence is not limited to architecture only, because it does not emanate from any specific work of the group. It is mainly due to the activities and the dynamism of Theo van Doesburg, ‘De Stijl's’ gifted and courageous leader. He propagated ‘De Stijl's’ principles and achievements all over Europe and by his fascinating lectures-the one I heard as a schoolboy has since remained in my memory as one of the most impressive speeches I have ever heard-and his great personal charm, he would find an echo even in the remotest corners of the Continent. He and the small group of friends and followers had to fight against various forms of resistance, i.e. conservatism, an inveterate addiction to baroque pomp, mere external show and façade. ‘De Stijl's’ principles and

achievements were attacked all over Europe during the whole period of ‘De Stijl's’ existence by the representatives of reactionary taste, mostly to be found among the ruling and administrative circles in the post-war European countries. But they succeeded -up to a certain point-because they were the manifestation of a really existing trend in contemporary European consciousness. Architecture, the designing of interiors, typography and many other fields of artistic activity were influenced and inspired by its example. Even in those arts literature and music, both only remotely connected with the original nucleus, ‘De Stijl’ made its influence felt.

1933 saw a temporary ending of ‘De Stijl's’ influence. Two things were of considerable importance in bringing about this ending: in the first place Van Doesburg's death in 1931. ‘De Stijl’, having lost its dynamic and inspired leader, no longer enjoyed the support of his active propaganda and his captivating charm. Yet the results of the movement would very probably have continued their effect unabatedly but for the accession to power of Fascism in Germany. ‘De Stijl’ influence, abstract art and its adherents belonged to the first and favourite scapegoats of national socialism. The Nazi leaders, most of them risen from the lower middle class, (the German ‘Spiessbürgertum’), impregnated by its narrow-minded and reactionary prejudices, did not hesitate to declare ‘De Stijl’ and its influence as ‘degenerate art’ in the very first ‘cultural’ strictures they made. They did, indeed, not misjudge ‘De Stijl’ in one respect: it would have been and eventually became, by reason of its quest for cleanliness and purity, one of the essential antagonists of Nazi pomp and showmanship, of the mendacious and pathetic theatrical performances staged by this régime. By its oppression of ‘De Stijl’ followers Nazism succeeded in spreading the influence of ‘De Stijl’ through the remainder of Europe and across to the New World.

The influence of ‘De Stijl’ on the different branches of artistic activity must be examined in this chapter and its traces followed through different countries and to various centres. ‘De Stijl's’ posterity, legitimate and illegitimate, can only be indicated sketchily here, for many of its offspring are beyond our reach, while others have vehemently denied their origin.

Special attention should be drawn to the further development of abstract painting according to ‘De Stijl's’ principles. Several of ‘DeStijl's’ members continued along their original course after Van Doesburg's death and the termination of ‘De Stijl’ as a group. But their lines of development diverged, although they did succeed in realizing still more of ‘De Stijl's’ purposes. On the other hand a growing number of younger painters has adopted, if not ‘De Stijl's’ programme, at least its outward appearance and its means of expression without a deep comprehension for its content: the new attitude towards man's life and his surroundings. This tendency, expanding over the whole of Western Europe and the United States bears, from the point of view of ‘De Stijl’, all the marks of mannerism and all the characteristics of what it would have termed ‘individual baroque’. It cannot be denied but that this trend has artistic merit,

but the relationship between ‘De Stijl’ and the younger groups is one of mere formal coincidence.

By its wide artistic range, by its many-sided inspiration ‘De Stijl’ has proved itself to be one of the most fruitful and influential movements of our time. Its range of influence has not yet been sufficiently probed and only a systematic consideration of its programme and its realizations enables us to trace its consequence.

Having examined ‘De Stijl's’ origin, its character and its influence and, having thus assembled the necessary facts and data, we feel entitled to answer the question as to the significance of ‘De Stijl’ with regard to its period and to the history of contemporary art. We now have at our disposal the material necessary to apply the ‘relative standard’ demanded by Oud, to our judgment of the significance of an historical fact in art.

The most important aspect of ‘De Stijl's’ significance lies in the fact that it must be considered as a kind of beacon. Its magnificent effort of purification showed to the arts the course they should follow in order to rid themselves of a cumbersome burden. This purification is all the more important as it points the way towards an objective, general and serviceable language in plastic art. By analysing the elements of plastic expression, the artists of ‘De Stijl’ have not only assisted in deciding the point of discrimination between essentials and accidentals in the field of fine arts, they have done a work as important as the constitution of the musical scale, which is the base of all subsequent development of our musical culture. All the other trends in abstract art rose out of a desire to express a personal and accidental sensibility. ‘De Stijl’, disdaining personal emotion and sensibility, is mainly concerned with the laws of artistic creation.

These laws of artistic creation do not gain such primary importance because they claim to be universally valid. Their significance lies in the fact that they manifest our way of thinking as it is to-day: they reveal the tendency of modern man to think dialectically and they stress the fact that we are conscious of our ability-and our duty-to create our own surroundings according to laws we have found by ourselves. The major importance of ‘De Stijl’ is the following historical act: that it has set up human thought and human ingeniousness against the capriciousness and arbitrary action of natural forces. This conception of art, which is in direct opposition to the traditional way of thinking, will be investigated in the final chapter of this study. The new and revolutionary conception of art has enabled ‘De Stijl’ to take the lead in the field of the arts and has invested it with the authority to impose its notions on other cultural activities.

J.J.P. Oud, whose writings have been quoted at the beginning of this introduction, prepares the readers of his book on Dutch architecture with the following lines: ‘Don't expect from me an unmoving picture of historically established facts. I am no art historian, but an architect. The future means more to me than the past and I prefer to discover the things to come rather than search for the facts that once were. But to look forwards means having a foothold in the retrospect, for the past instructs us in the future’.[4]

The art historian can agree entirely with these last sentences. He might be permitted to add his sincere conviction that even a picture consisting of historically established facts is capable of conveying a message which permits us a glimpse into the future. If this study is able to bring this about, it may lead us to a better understanding of our time and, above all, be a means towards acquiring a greater appreciation of modern art.

Eindnoten:

N.B. 'Mondriaan, Essays' refers to 'Plastic art and pure plastic art', 1937 and other essays, (1941-1943) by Piet Mondriaan, Wittenborn-Schultz Inc., New York, 1945.

1 Oud, Holländische Architektur, p. 33
2 H. Taine, Philosophie de l'art, Paris, Hachette, 1903, p. 101
3 K. Marx, Speech on the Revolution 1848, in 'The People's paper', London, 19/IV/1856
4 Oud, Holländische Architektur, p. 7

2 dates and facts

The date of the birth of *De Stijl* has been established exactly. The introduction to the first number of the periodical, written by Van Doesburg, bears the date June 16th, 1917. And with the first number of this small, unobtrusive monthly, 'De Stijl' presents itself to the world as a closed whole, a dynamic and revolutionary movement. The formation of the group (as far as there can be question of a 'group') and the publishing of the periodical is mainly due to Theo van Doesburg who, then and later, has ever been unanimously acknowledged as the leader and the moving force behind *De Stijl*. The other constituent members mentioned by Van Doesburg in his retrospective survey on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of 'De Stijl', were the painters Piet Mondriaan and Vilmos Huszar, the architect J.J.P. Oud and the poet A. Kok.[5] Next to these, the numbers of the first year contain contributions by the other members: the painters Bart van der Leck and Gino Severini, the architects Jan Wils and Robert van 't Hoff and the sculptor Georges Vantongerloo.

The introduction to the first number is in itself a programme. We may there-

fore be permitted to quote some of its crucial pronouncements in order to demonstrate 'De Stijl's' beginning:

'The object of this little periodical is to contribute something towards the development of a new sense of beauty. It wishes to make modern man aware of the new ideas that have sprung up in the Plastic Arts. It wants to set up the logical principles of a maturing style which is based upon a clearer relation between the spirit of the age and the means of expression, against the archaic confusion, the "modern baroque". It wants to combine in itself the present-day ideas on modern plastic art, ideas which, though fundamentally the same, have been developed individually and independently (...).

When the new ideas on modern plastic beauty do not seem to penetrate the general public, it becomes the task of the expert to awaken the layman's sense of beauty. The really modern, i.e. conscious artist has a twofold mission. In the first place he must create the purely visual work of art; in the second place he should make the general public susceptible to the beauty of such purely visual art. for this reason, a periodical of an intimate character has become necessary (...). This will prepare the way for the existence of a profounder culture of art, founded upon a common embodiment of the new cognizance of the plastic arts. As soon as the artists in the various branches of plastic art will have realized that they must speak a universal language, they will no longer cling to their individuality with such anxiety. They will serve a general principle far beyond the limitations of individuality. By serving the general principle they will be made to produce, of their own accord, an organic style. The propagation of beauty necessitates a spiritual communion and not a social one. A spiritual communion however, cannot be brought about without sacrificing the ambitious individuality. Only by consistently following this principle can the new plastic beauty manifest itself in all objects as a style, born from a new relationship between the artist and society'.[6]

In *De Stijl* Van Doesburg had truly succeeded in assembling all the artists who were fanatically devoted to these principles: to eschew all manner of accidental representation and to return to the objective elements of plastic art without any specific assertion of the artist's own individuality. These principles, he knew, would inevitably produce a style - a new language of plastic art, spoken by the artist and comprehensible to the spectator. He had succeeded in assembling, in and around 'De Stijl', all those who were enthusiastically convinced of the objective future of the plastic arts; all the artists who were to be found in that small and secluded segment of territory that was Holland during the 1914-1918 war. But it took some time as well as the exceptional constellation of those days to complete the constitution of 'De Stijl'. The war had brought many Dutch artists who had been working abroad, back to their native country and these came back to the Netherlands charged with the results of their studies and full of new and promising ideas. In the Netherlands they found an atmosphere of spiritual tension, generated by the fact of the country's being a neutral enclave, an oasis in a continent at war. The history of 'De

Stijl' or, at least, of its embryonic stage, therefore dates from the year 1914.

1914.

Theo van Doesburg, who had already gained some reputation as a painter, an art critic and an essayist, is called up and serves on the Belgian frontier. Piet Mondriaan, arriving in Holland for a visit, is surprised there by the outbreak of war and unable to return to Paris where he had been living since 1911, greatly[+] under the influence of cubism. He had, towards 1914, digested this influence and turned it into a style of his own, by starting his 'plus and minus' paintings of that year. These he continued while living on the Dutch sea coast. He then comes to live at Amsterdam. Vilmos Huszar lives at Voorburg, where he attempts the stylizing of form. Oud, having settled in the previous year at Leiden, collaborates with the architects Kamerlingh Onnes, Dudok and Van der Steur. Van der Leck returns from a trip to Morocco where he has made drawings of the mines and the Arab workers while trying to simplify the forms as much as possible. Robert van 't Hoff, after studying in the United States, where he discovered for himself the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, comes back to Holland and remains there during the war. Jan Wils works as an architect at the Hague, in close contact with Berlage's studio. Georges Vantongerloo comes to the Hague; he is a Belgian sculptor and a refugee.

[+] *pl. 8* aant.

1915.

Van Doesburg, still on the Belgian frontier but occasionally home at Leiden, discusses the project of a periodical with Oud. He contacts Mondriaan, but the latter's answer is negative as yet. 'You won't take me amiss, but good things have to grow very slowly. I mention this with regard to the project for the foundation of a periodical, about which I have heard from Lou Saalborn. I believe that the time has not yet come for it. There is more to be achieved in that direction. I scarcely know anyone who really does produce our style of art, that is to say, art that has as yet attained some sort of perfection. I believe that for the time being, you will do sufficiently well in *Eenheid*, ("Unity", a weekly edited in Leiden at that time). There won't be enough material for a specialized magazine or else it will be half-hearted, (that is to say, you'll have to accept things which do not wholeheartedly subscribe to ourideas.'[7] In another letter to Van Doesburg, Mondriaan characterizes the trend of his work: 'As you see, it is a composition of vertical and horizontal lines which, abstractedly, will have to give the impression of rising up, of height. The same idea was meant to be conveyed in cathedral construction formerly. As in this case the manner of expression, (de Beelding) and not the subject matter should express this idea, I did not name this composition. The abstract human mind will have to receive the intended impression by its own means. I always confine myself to expressing the universal, that is, the eternal (closest to the spirit) and I do so in the simplest of external forms, in order to be able to express the inner meaning as lightly veiled as possible.'[8]

In 1915 Oud designs a public baths, very much under the influence of Berlage. In the course of the same year Dr. Schoenmaekers publishes his book *Het nieuwe wereldbeeld* (The new image of the world), a fundamental work of 'positive

mysticism'. Finally, Van Doesburg makes the acquaintance of Anthony Kok at Tilburg.

1916.

At the end of this year (1915, 1916?) Van Doesburg is demobilized and returns to Leiden where he takes up his painting and writing again. On his return to civilian life he finds the country 'in a contrasting state of spiritual friction within - and material struggle without.'[9] Mondriaan has moved to Laren, where he continues his research into plastic art. Van der Leck too, has moved to Laren and is painting in a very simplified form and in primary colours; his[+] two principal works of that year are 'Tempest' and 'Labour in the Harbour', (both in the collection of the Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo). At Laren too, Dr. Schoenmaekers publishes his second work on positive mysticism: *Plastic mathematics*; he is in close contact with both Mondriaan and Van der Leck. While at Laren, Mondriaan makes the acquaintance of Mr S.B. Slijper, who is to be an admirer and a collector of his work until Mondriaan leaves Europe. In Leiden, Van Doesburg starts to collaborate with the architect Oud and occasionally with Wils, while at Tilburg, in contact with Kok he writes his first elementary poems.

[+] *pl. 10*[aant.]

Robert van 't Hoff meanwhile, had built two houses at Huis-ter-Heide, near Utrecht: a residence and a small bungalow, (*De Stijl*, II, pl. 3, 5, 6, 15, 17 and pp. 30 and 32). The importance of these two buildings was, that they demonstrated not only the theory, but also the tangible practice of the new ideas about architecture, developed by Frank Lloyd Wright. In these two houses, horizontalism prevails, but in the matter of aesthetic importance of the horizontal parts, hitherto untried simplification of the elements of expression is achieved. And this may be considered the principal reason for the importance which was attached to these buildings, for they were acknowledged to be an important step towards the rise of a new Dutch architecture after Berlage.

1917.

This year was of the greatest importance for the concentration of the various efforts for reaching a common goal. Van Doesburg, completely freed from military service, talks about his project of a periodical which is to comprise the joint contributions and to stimulate the common ideal. He discusses his ideas in Leiden with the architect Oud and with the painter Huszar, then living at Voorburg. At the same time he gets in touch with the painters Mondriaan and Van der Leck at Laren. He encourages Mondriaan to put his ideas into writing and he induces Van der Leck, who had already felt the need of a periodical for painters, to join him in this effort. The tenor of the discussions is reflected in a letter by Mondriaan, addressed to Van Doesburg and dated Feb. 13th, 1917. 'You should remember that my things are still intended to be paintings, that is to say, they are plastic representations, in and by themselves, not part of a building. Furthermore, they have been made in a small room. Also, that I

use subdued colours for the time being, adapting myself to the present surroundings and to the outer world; this does not mean that I should not prefer a pure colouring. Otherwise you might think that I contradict myself in my

work.'[10] The contents of this letter show how the discussions were already concentrated on the principle of pure means of expression and that the relation between painting and architecture was of the first importance. Van Doesburg could point back to his articles, written as early as 1912: he then already indicated the new principles of abstraction. In his retrospective survey of 1929 Van Doesburg writes: '...as the entire ideology had long since preceded our creative activity and this before there could have been any question of a "Stijl" movement.'[11] In a number of articles, published by Van Doesburg in various reviews (*Eenheid, De Avondpost, Nieuwe Amsterdammer, etc.*), from 1912 onwards, the foundation of a new style has not only been sketched in principle, but even in external appearance. Thus the need for the straight line, the rectangular principle as the means of future expression in art and architecture, were demonstrated. Indeed, Van Doesburg had published an article in *Eenheid* in 1912, from which he later quotes: 'where, on the pretext of beauty, the undulating line had been predominant, this line was simplified for reasons of truth until it finally attained a new basis: the straight line.'[12] He says that: 'in the plastic use of the straight line lies the consciousness of a new culture '[12] and he considered calling the new periodical *The straight line*. But the growth of the small group, with their very definite sense of their collective task, made him change his mind. And the ideas of his Laren friends, who were under the spell of Dr. Schoenmaekers' theories, may have been of some influence. Their concentration on the collective task, including both painting and architecture, produced the title *De Stijl*. 'Our collective claims were based on the absolute devaluation of tradition, tradition which we had perhaps loved most of all and therefore exhausted soonest (.....). It was our inner need for showing up the whole "trick" of painting, to expose the whole swindle of lyricism and sentiment.'[13]

The first half of 1917 was devoted to the concentration of the various efforts. The common denominator seemed, at first, to be the quest for a radical renewal. But Van Doesburg was able to point out that the various artists had more in common: 'the need for abstraction and simplification.' The mathematical temperament was emphasized, in opposition to Impressionism, which was rejected; everything that did not aim at ultimate consistency was called 'baroque'. Everyone agreed that the struggle was directed against baroque in its many ramifications. The aim was the destruction of the baroque painting, of morphoplasticism, of the curve, precisely because it was unable to express the new spirit of our epoch and embody the idea of a new spiritual and manly culture (.....). The brown world had to be replaced by a white one. In these two notions of colour the entire difference between the old and the new was contained. The brown world found its expression in lyricism, vagueness and sentimentality, up to the ultimate limit marked by Cubism. The white world began with Cézanne and, by way of Van Gogh and initial Cubism, led up to elementary construction, to clear structure of colour, to architectural, unsentimental plasticism (.....). At the very moment that the most radical artists working in Holland had isolated themselves

from the public life of the arts, the notion was conceived to fight individualism by means of a periodical which would bring a clear picture of common activity and assemble all the creative powers which had drawn, in their proper domain, the conclusions from a new era. Out of this common need for clarity, for certainty and for *order*, I founded the periodical *De Stijl*.[14] When doing so, Van Doesburg and his associates were conscious of 'accomplishing a mission which will remain unique in the history of art and culture.'[15]

The new principles were first realized in painting and the first numbers of *De Stijl* show the results as well as the proof of a complete unanimity.[+] Mondriaan's paintings of 1917, (*De Stijl*, I, pl.6) and a painting of Van Doesburg's also dated 1917, show the same characteristics: rectangles of primary colour in[+]rhythmic mutual relation, on a white background. Van der Leck's works are closely related to this pictorial scheme. It would be illogical and contradictory, in dealing with a collective movement as 'De Stijl' to raise the question as to who had started it. The different influences on the result will be examined later on by considering the share, each of the painters contributed through his origin and the history of his achievements.

[+]*pl. 12, 16*[aant. aant.]

[+]*pl. 15*[aant.]

The painters had come to a new type of painting by an absolute exclusion of subject matter and the exclusive use of primary plastic elements; the architects simultaneously endeavoured to realize the same principles. The first result is[+]Oud's design for houses on the esplanade above a beach (*De Stijl*, I, pl. 2). Rectilinear and rectangular of composition, this sketch arrives at an architectural solution, inspired by the same quest for clarity and order. It is based, as are the contemporary paintings, on the plastic element and nothing else. The tradition of the historic styles, still surreptitiously present in Berlage's work, is completely abolished and all individual expression has been suppressed.

[+]*pl. 24*[aant.]

This project, in its ultimate purity, was not built, but it might just as well not have been designed for building but merely in order to prove the architectural scope. In the same year though, Oud built two important houses; the villa 'Allegonda' at Katwijk (in collaboration with M. Kamerlingh Onnes) and the hostel 'De Vonk' in Noordwijkerhout. In both buildings, part af the interior decoration was entrusted to Van Doesburg. He broke with the principle of interior decoration and designed the objects in his charge (f.i. the floor of the hall at Noordwijkerhout, *De Stijl*, II, pl. 1 and 2), as logical parts of an architectural composition. By the clear division of work between the architect and the painter - according to Van der Leck's claims, published in *De Stijl*, I, p. 6 - this collaboration succeeded in realizing a counterpoint composition, indicating the way for a logical and independent collaboration of the two branches of art on the same basis and according to the same principles, that is to say, towards a new style.

Van der Leck had, in the same year, designed the furniture for a living room and Huszar did so soon afterwards. All these efforts were directed towards the same goal: the unity of the independent branches of plastic art, every one of these to rely entirely on its own elementary means of expression. By this concert

of perfectly tuned instruments, a mutual harmony would once more become possible.

Sculpture contributed its share by the work of Georges Vantongerloo. By utter simplification and by the application of mathematical laws, Vantongerloo[+] arrived at similar conclusions: his 'composition in a sphere' (1917) is the first work of sculpture, based entirely on elementary means of expression and completely excluding subject-matter. [+]*pl. 18*[aant.]

Apart from the creative activity of this year, the theoretical side must not be neglected. In 1917, Van Doesburg published his book *De nieuwe beweging in de schilderkunst*, Delft, J. Waltman (The new movement in the art of painting) and Mondriaan started the publication of his ideas in *De Stijl*. His article on *Neoplasticism in the art of painting* (De nieuwe beelding in de schilderkunst) is the philosophical foundation for the principles of 'De Stijl' and not ohly as far as art is concerned. In it, he develops a far-reaching view on life and on the universe, the significance of which we will examine later. But the fact that his articles were published in the very first numbers of *De Stijl* and were written at the special instigation of Van Doesburg, as a result of long discussions which preceded the birth of *De Stijl* proves clearly that 'De Stijl' has been, from its very beginning, a movement reaching far beyond the traditional limits of fine art.

1918.

This year brings about the consolidation of the group together with the elaboration of its ideas. 'Gradually we began to present a closed front. By working there had been created not only a clarity in the collective consciousness of our group, but we had gained a certainty, which made it possible for us to define our collective attitude towards life and to perpetrate it according to the requirements of the period (.....). As the world war was coming to an end, we all came to feel the need of securing an interest in our efforts beyond the narrow boundaries of Holland.'[16] Van Doesburg's studio in Leiden became the centre of animated discussions on the new way of expression and the results were soon published in his periodical.

[+]In painting, Mondriaan reverts to the use of black lines, dividing his canvas into rectangles of mostly primary, though somewhat subdued colours. Van der[+] Leck continues his researches in primary colour, with rectangles distributed according to a rhythmic sequence on a white plane. Van Doesburg, perhaps as[+] a result of his work at Noordwijkerhout, begins to fill in more and more the plane. Huszar develops a form of composition (*De Stijl*, II, pl. 7) where the entire surface of the canvas is covered by an interplay of rectangles in various shades of grey. As the changes in the direction of the research, and above all things the important participation of architects, did not agree with Van der Leck's views, he left the group and from then on continued his researches on his own. Two compositions of 1918 show clearly, how he succeeded in consistently developing his striving for an objective way of expression (nos. 56 and 57 of the retrospective exhibition, 1949, Amsterdam, in the possession of Messrs. Nieuwenhuizen Segaar). Another important landmark in Van der Leck's personal development and in the evolution of 'De Stijl' is his interior design realized [+]*pl. 22*[aant.] [+]*pl. 20*[aant.] [+]*pl. 21*[aant.]

in collaboration with the architect P.J.C. Klaarhamer for the stand of Messrs. Bruynzeel at the Utrecht fair in the same year. It was the first realization of 'De Stijl's' principles in interior design (cf. *Levende kunst*, 1919, year II, nr. 1).

Architecture presents another aspect in this year. Oud designs a complex of standardised houses and in consequence of his appointment as city architect of Rotterdam, prepares the plan for a block of houses at Rotterdam, block nr. I of the Spangen settlement, which plan was executed in the course of the same year. Wils has been commissioned to design, the renewal of the hotel 'De dubbele Sleutel' at Woerden. The result (*De Stijl*, II, pl. 10 and p. 58-59-60) shows, how the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright has been transformed by 'De Stijl' movement since 1916, the year of the construction of the two houses by Robert van 't Hoff. The then prevailing horizontalism was now changed into an interplay of vertical and horizontal movements, with the chimney as most important vertical accent and the lines of the cornice as its horizontal counterbalance. In any case, the building strives after the perfection of Oud's boulevard project - though the latter design should not be compared with an executed building.

The most important fact of the year however, is not to be found in direct plastic activity: it is 'De Stijl's' first manifesto, published in November 1918, at the close of the first world war. It is signed by the painters Van Doesburg, Mondriaan and Huszar, the architects Van 't Hoff and Wils, the poet Kok and the sculptor Vantongerloo, i.e. by all the original members, with the exception of Oud - who never signed any manifesto - and Van der Leck. It opens with a resounding paragraph: 'There is an old and a new consciousness of time. The old is connected with the individual. The new is connected with the universal. The struggle of the individual against the universal is revealing itself in the world war as well as in the art of the present day.'[17] And it calls for the 'Formation of an international unity in Life, Art, Culture, either intellectually or materially.'[18]

This manifesto was launched in order to promote 'De Stijl's' activity beyond the Dutch boundaries and to assemble artists and sympathizing laymen at a centre, which was already in existence when people in other European countries barely realized the need for a similar institution.

The reaction was not long in arriving: very soon after the Armistice Van Doesburg was able to take up contact with artists in other countries. Thus he realized his ideas of 1916 and earlier, namely to create a truly international movement in modern art, which was not hampered by any individual limitations, not even geographical ones. 'De Stijl' had aimed, from its very beginning, at an international orientation; yet it remains a fact, that the majority of its members were Dutch by birth and education and that the movement had been started in the Netherlands. The importance of these facts will have to be examined later on, when we will endeavour to draw conclusions from them.

1919.

For De Stijl as a whole, the echo's and repercussions of the 1918 manifesto now become obvious. The contents of the periodical become more and more international and contacts with other countries are soon established; Van

Doesburg endeavours to link up with groups of artists abroad; he gets in touch with French, Italian, German, Belgian artists and does his utmost to establish contact with the artists of the young Soviet Republic.

Meanwhile, the work of 'De Stijl' artists proceeds towards a further+ clarification of the principles. In painting, Van Doesburg and Mondriaan both pass through a short phase during which they divide their canvases into a system of squares, mathematically established. The colouring is in a less primary scale and lacks some of the splendour of the works of previous years. A good example+ of a painting by Van Doesburg of this period is in the collection of Mr. Rinsema. The type of composition and the colour scheme may perhaps be explained by Van Doesburg's experiments with stained glass, a technique practised by him in that year and of which his paintings of 1919 are somewhat reminiscent. Huszar in the same year designs stained glass as well - a finished specimen of white glass in different types and shades is still extant.

+*pl. 27*aant.

+*pl. 23*aant.

The year is important for architecture as well. Oud, who continues his work at the Spangen settlement, gives another proof of his advanced ideas by+ designing a project for a factory in his native town of Purmerend. This project (*De Stijl*, III, pl. 6) demonstrates, besides parts somewhat reminiscent of Berlage (left) and of Frank Lloyd Wright (right) a central portion which is a complete realization of 'De Stijl's' principles in architecture. The other important asset to 'De Stijl's' architectural side is the fact that Rietveld joins the group and contributes to the common effort by dealing with a form of art hitherto neglected: the design and execution of furniture. The first work of his hand,+ published in *De Stijl* is his armchair, a construction in standardized strips of wood, according to the aesthetic principles of the group (*De Stijl*, II, pl. 22). A+ sideboard and a chair (*De Stijl*, III, pl. 7) date from the same year, and another plate (III, pl. 14) gives an example (1919) of an interior, designed and coloured by Van Doesburg, with Rietveld furniture. The collaboration and the drive towards unity of the arts had gone a step further through Rietveld's inclusion.

+*pl. 30*aant.

+*pl. 19*aant.

+*pl. 31*aant.

Contributions to sculpture were Vantongerloo's first small plastic+ compositions entirely realized according to 'De Stijl' principles, illustrated in the third annual set of *De Stijl*, pl. 2, which were unfortunately lost at the Stockholm exhibition in 1930.

+*pl. 29*aant.

On the theoretical side of the movement, Mondriaan's articles in *De Stijl* are of the highest importance. In the second volume of *De Stijl* he publishes his articles on the 'determinate and the undeterminate', his 'dialogue on neoplasticism' (*Dialoog over de nieuwe beelding*) and the trialogue 'natural and abstract reality' (*Natuurlijke en abstracte realiteit*), continued in the third annual. Mondriaan, on his return to Paris in the first half of the year, keeps in touch only by frequent letters to the remainder of the group.

1920.

The international orientation of *De Stijl* becomes very obvious by a long journey of Van Doesburg, in order to spread 'De Stijl' ideas throughout Europe. He visits

Belgium and Germany and sets up a series of personal contacts, chiefly among architects. At the same time, criticism in Holland is very

severe, but it does not harm the group at all. A proof can be found in a letter addressed to Van Doesburg by Mondriaan: 'I am very glad that the criticism is what it is. It is all right that way. In complete opposition to our direction. Otherwise we would have nothing to do. I got another impression from your letter, but it is much better this way. There we see again: we have straightly to oppose the whole to-do, *à part*.'[19] The journey of Van Doesburg had been organised on that basis as well: he had intended to upset traditional prejudices by the force of his opposition and by the convincing clearness of 'De Stijl's' principles.

These principles had gained new strength in 1920 by the publication of Mondriaan's pamphlet *Le Néo-plasticisme*, published by Léonce Rosenberg in Paris. This small publication is of great importance to 'De Stijl' ideology, as it is a condensed survey of the aesthetical and philosophical ideas of the group. It must be examined in connection with Mondriaan's other articles and with the general opinions of the group.

The artistic evolution of the group continues steadily. In Paris, Mondriaan (who from now on spells his name with only one 'a') commences to develop his[+] mature manner: heavy black lines divide the canvas into a rhythmic pattern of rectangles of various colours, mainly primary. Van Doesburg devotes most of this year's activity to architecture: in collaboration with the architect De Boer he builds a series of workmen's dwellings and schools at Drachten in the province of Friesland. Oud builds the blocks of the Tusschendijken settlement at Rotterdam which have since then been destroyed by the war and designs a small warehouse (*De Stijl*, III, pl. 12). The architects Wils and Van 't Hoff, from this year on, are slightly aloof from the other members of the group.

[+]*pl. 32*[aant.]

The main accent of the year 1920, though, is *De Stijl's* contact with literature. Van Doesburg, Mondriaan and Kok publish in the April issue of 1920, the second manifesto of 'De Stijl' on literature. The very first sentences already characterise the tenor of the whole piece: 'The organism of our contemporary literature still continues to batten on the sentimentality of a weakened generation. The word is dead.'[20]. The manifesto shows the influence of the Dada-movement, which had brought new life to Van Doesburg's literary experiments. After having written poems in a new style inspired by Marinetti as early as in 1913, Van Doesburg returns to poetry in 1920. Under the pseudonym of I.K. Bonset he publishes his *X-beelden* (X-Images) in the third set of *De Stijl*, as well as fragments of his novel *Het andere gezicht* (The other face). The first of these aphorisms is dedicated to Dadaism 'If there hides a deeper sense than that of the rule behind "nonsense", then "nonsense" is not only permitted but even necessary. In this way Dadaism will create new, supersensual rules.'[21] In order not to confuse the readers and the members of 'De Stijl', Van Doesburg did choose not to publish his Dadaist work under his own name, but he was fully conscious of the contribution of Dadaism to the field of literature - as strictly as he denied its value in the field of the plastic arts. He gives an account of his ideas in his 1929 recapitulation of *De Stijl's* history: 'Out of the chaos of the old, shattered world Dadaism created a new imaginary world by the power of the

word, a world of transformation, of pure poetry. It is no accident that the two diametrically opposed tendencies, neo-plasticism and dadaism (now surrealism) formed a parallel: the creative art of the word. Thereby can be explained that the leaders of "De Stijl" movement, in spite of the violent opposition of many collaborators, sympathized with dadaism and publicly manifested this sympathy.'[22] 'De Stijl' and dadaism found a common task in the research for an elementary means of expression in literature. The interest in the art of the word is a proof of the universal interestedness of *De Stijl* and it is not without importance for its further history, were it only as a balance.

1921.

The main activity of 'De Stijl' has been transferred during this year to Germany. Van Doesburg's contact with the German architects in the previous year now yielded results. And the spirit of opposition and radicalism remained dominant. Van Doesburg finds a new centre for his activities at the Weimar 'Bauhaus' and gradually succeeds in spreading 'De Stijl' ideas there, thereby transforming the character of the 'Bauhaus'. In the winter of 1921 the first meeting took place at the home of Bruno Taut near Berlin, where the so-called 'Bauhäusler' assembled with their chief, Walter Gropius and the architects Adolf Meyer, Forbat as well as many others. The Weimar Bauhaus was, as a matter of fact, a kind of an institute where postwar sensations (as Gropius himself called it) 'were expressed by plastic means'.[23] Van Doesburg intended to change the entire atmosphere and propagate the principles of a universal expression. 'At Weimar I have radically overturned everything. This is the famous academy, which now has the most modern teachers! I have talked to the pupils every evening and I have infused the poison of the new spirit everywhere. *De Stijl* will soon be published again and more radically. I have mountains of strength, and I know now that our notions will be victorious over everyone and everything.'[24]

On the other side we have the testimony of Peter Röhl, then a pupil of the Bauhaus and later on an associate of *De Stijl*: 'The year 1921 was of great importance for Weimar and for the development of German art. In that year the Dutchman Theo van Doesburg came to Weimar as our guest. His activities were devoted to the new way of expression, which he brought in his work as a stimulus. Through his periodical *De Stijl* (.....) he made us acquainted with the work of "De Stijl" artists in Holland. He zealously propagated the best foreign artists, who have acknowledged the expression of new spirit. His lectures illustrated with slides stimulated the younger generation which at that time was assembled at the Weimar Bauhaus. Many pupils accepted the doctrine of the new expression, which has its master in Van Doesburg. I have been an enthousiastic pupil of this master and I honour him as the herald and pathfinder of the new era.'[25]

In 1921, through Van Doesburg's German contacts, 'De Stijl' was expanded further still by the inclusion of Hans Richter, who had developed the first abstract films in collaboration with the Swedish painter Viking Eggeling. In the discussions with Richter about the new form of expression developed by him,

the problem of the fourth dimension first came within the scope of *De Stijl* by the addition of time to the means of expression then available. Richter participated in 'De Stijl' activities during the next few years and published the results of his research in Van Doesburg's paper.

Meanwhile, the activities of the other members developed still further. Mondriaan's mature style arrived at its full ripeness during this year. The first[+] canvases in which rectangles of pure colour alternate with the white plane on a surface, divided by black lines, date from 1921, viz. the specimen reproduced in the fourth volume of *De Stijl*, p. 113. In the years to come, Mondriaan only perfected and purified this method, not adding any new features until 1926. In this year Huszar constructed a mechanical theatre according to 'De Stijl' principles, which is reproduced on p. 127 of the fourth volume with an explanation by the author; and also designed several interiors, in collaboration with Wils (*De Stijl* V, p. 14-15).

[+]*pl. 33*[aant.]

The architectural side of the movement is less active in this year; both Oud and Wils are busy with projects for large settlements. Oud's important architectural programme published in his *Bauhausbuch* - dates from this year. Vantongerloo, the sculptor of the movement, has gone back to Belgium and then to the South of France, and has somewhat drifted away from the group.

But literature is even more important than the year before. There are several contributions from German dadaist authors, an important share is that of Van Doesburg's second ego, Bonset and, by a splendid mystification, he has even developed a third, the Italian author Aldo Camini, whom he presents in *De Stijl* with a short introduction, brilliantly written (*De Stijl* IV, p. 65). Bonset and Kok publish poetry, Bonset's *Letterklankbeelden* are an entirely new form of musical poetry; Camini publishes a novel. Apart from his writings in *De Stijl*, Van Doesburg publishes a series of dadaist pamphlets in collaboration with Arp, Til Brugman, Tzara, Ribemont Dessaignes, Schwitters, Hausmann and others. A letter addressed to Anthony Kok gives us an indication of the state of mind in which *Mecano* was produced: 'I intend to edit a splendid bulletin, on the meanest paper existing, but still very modern. If you happen to have a spiritual dadaist piece, do send it to me for this bulletin.'[26]

But in general, the fourth annual set of *De Stijl* is characterized by a new interest in modern technique, in the work of the engineer. The new attitude is clearly expressed in the third manifesto of 'De Stijl', starting with the words: 'The reign of the spirit has begun' and closing, after an emphatic rejection of all other movements, with the imperative command: 'Work!'[27]

1922.

After four years of constructive work and after many sacrifices by its members - and especially by Van Doesburg who cared for the regular publication of the periodical and paid all the expenses - the fifth year of *De Stijl* brings a consolidation of ideas and activities. When publishing a retrospective article on five years of 'Stijl' activity, in the last issue of that year, Van Doesburg could write: 'So "De Stijl" honouring in Mondriaan the father of neo-plasticism, became the common profession of a non-national and non-individualistic (and

in its ultimate consequences collective) power of expression.'[28] The various participants had merged into one body which directed their activities towards the common goal.

The facts confirm Van Doesburg's ideal. Since 1922 'De Stijl' has become more of a reality, its realizations more and more visible. Van Doesburg, during this period, concentrates less on the plastic arts, as he is entirely absorbed by his literary research. 1922 sees his dadaist tour through Holland, where he lectures on the dada movement in collaboration with Schwitters. Both he and Schwitters recited poems, with Mrs. Petro van Doesburg giving piano recitals of contemporary music. He furthermore holds a series of lectures at the Weimar Bauhaus. Anyhow, the last months of the year bring up a renewal of his architectural researches, which were furthered by the fact that he was joined by Van Eesteren, a young Dutch architect who had just won his Prix de Rome but had gone over entirely to modern conceptions. In Paris, Mondriaan elaborates his style, attaining even greater maturity. At the same time he completes his universal conception of neo-plasticism by dealing with the possible consequences and the parallel phenomena of neo-plasticism on the domains of music and architecture. Huszar continues his researches in interior decorating and reaches results in the applied arts: a set of chessmen, designed in 1921, is made during 1922, as the interior of a bedroom (*De Stijl* V, p. 76 and after p. 208).

Architecture shows a series of new results, published in the summary of the 1922 annual and elsewhere in the other numbers of that year: Wils' settlement of 'Daal en Berg' at The Hague, the complex of Oud-Mathenesse in Rotterdam by Oud, and the architectural modernization of a jeweller's shop in Amsterdam by Rietveld, which has since been completely spoiled (*De Stijl* V, opp. pp. 24 and 25). In 1922, at the opening of the Bauhaus Oud delivered a lecture stating his artistic principles. In 1922 Van Doesburg, Huszar and Schwitters, each painted one room in the apartment of Til Brugman in the Hague - the fourth room was left white - it housed a painting by Mondriaan.

A new asset to *De Stijl* was the brief collaboration of the Russian constructivist El Lissitzky, whom Van Doesburg had met in Berlin and in Weimar. The double issue, nr. 10/11 of *De Stijl* was dedicated entirely to his work, attention to which had already been drawn in earlier numbers.

Richter's film researches continued and found publication in *De Stijl*. The literary movement in 'De Stijl' is again represented by Van Doesburg's 'twin brothers' Bonset and Camini.

As to 'De Stijl's' expansion in Europe, the international congress of progressive artists in Düsseldorf in May 1922 furnished a welcome opportunity to launch a resounding declaration of principles. There, Van Doesburg established new contacts for *De Stijl* which were, later on, to prove to be important for 'De Stijl's' spreading across Europe. Though in straight opposition to the general attitude of the congress, Van Doesburg succeeded in cutting a path for 'De Stijl's' principles with an important minority.

1923.

The new year brings an important revival of ‘De Stijl's’ architectural

activities. The centre of gravity is transferred, in 1923, from Germany to Paris, where Van Doesburg and Mondriaan meet again. Two reasons account for the predominance of architecture in that year's activities: in the first instance an invitation by Léonce Rosenberg to exhibit in a comprehensive show the architectural results of 'De Stijl' and secondly the fact that 'De Stijl' architects of the first period, Oud, Wils and Van 't Hoff have gradually withdrawn to the background. Their place was filled, in the architectural section of the group, by the collaboration of Van Doesburg, Van Eesteren and Rietveld. It is important, in this context, to peruse carefully the proclamation issued by the architects; in it a new note is sounded: 'By our collective work we have examined the architecture as a plastic unity of all arts and we have found that the consequence will bring a new style. We have examined the laws of space(.....) and we have found that all the variations of space can be governed as an equilibrated unity.'[29]

'We have examined - and we have found'... there is a new trend within 'De Stijl': up to now it had deduced its principles from speculative reasoning. Now the method of experimentation enters into their system and this new approach is mainly due to Van Eesteren's collaboration with Van Doesburg. When we consider the architectural design, resulting from the collaboration of the two artists, we can trace a gradual development from a Utopian scheme (the 'idea' of a house as an architectural problem) towards a design which could be made a fact by building it. This analysis of architecture, this search for the elements of architectural creation, is an act logically related to 'De Stijl' principles and highly important to the development of modern architecture.

The exhibition of 'De Stijl' at the Paris gallery of Léonce Rosenberg was a revelation to modern architects. The most important pieces (all ill. in *De Stijl*[+] VI, issue 6/7) were: the model and drawings for a private house, commissioned by Léonce Rosenberg, a result of the collaboration of Van Doesburg, Van Eesteren and Rietveld; the designs for the hall of a university by Van Doesburg and Van Eesteren; and the project for an artist's house, also a result of the collaboration of both artists. Drawings and reproductions of the work of the other 'Stijl' architects completed the exhibition. Van Doesburg writes about the architectural activity of this year: 'The house has been analysed, it has been dissected into its plastic elements. The static axis of the old construction has been destroyed: the house has become an object, one can circle on all sides. This analytical method led to new possibilities of construction and to a new ground plan. The house was detached from the soil and the ceiling became a kind of roof-terrace, a second story laid open. At that time these questions were completely novel and no one had considered them as seriously as these young Dutch architects and painters did.'[30]

[+]*pl. 40, 41* aant. aant.

The results of this analytical method were not only manifested at the Paris exhibition. While Van Doesburg and Van Eesteren worked in Paris, Rietveld executed several works in Holland which expressed the same spirit: the interior decoration and the furniture of a doctor's house at Maarssen (ill. *De Stijl* VI, opp. p. 40) and several examples of his furniture, viz. a child's chair (ill. *De*

+*Stijl* VI, p. 64). Oud built the small administrative building for the Rotterdam Oud-Mathenesse settlement. +*pl. 24* aant.

The pictorial activities of 'De Stijl' are limited to the architectural side. Yet, Mondriaan is now reaching a further evolution of his style. Van Doesburg only creates a few paintings in this year, where squares in primary colours are combined in a rhythm, though without any dividing black lines. This scheme of composition heralds his later period.

The literary activity of 'De Stijl' continues, reinforced by contributors from Holland and from abroad, as the poetess and essayist Til Brugman, and the French writer Ribemont Dessaignes. In other fields, the activity of 'De Stijl' is completed by the support, after Van Eesteren, of the Austrian scenic designer and architect F. Kiesler, and of Werner Graeff, a pupil of the Bauhaus.

1924.

The exhibition of 1923, at Léonce Rosenberg's gallery 'L'Effort moderne' had been such a success, that it had to be repeated and so furthered by a second exhibition at the Paris 'Ecole spéciale d'Architecture'. Simultaneously, copies of the architectural drawings were exhibited with Van Doesburg's drawings at the Weimar museum in a personal show of Van Doesburg's work. Later in the year, the Paris exhibition was transferred to Nancy, where it had considerable influence on the younger generation of the eastern part of France.

While other members worked abroad, an important piece of 'Stijl' work was+ executed in the Netherlands: Rietveld's house at Utrecht (ill. De Stijl VI, p. 160 and 140 bis). It was the first house, built according to the new architectural principles of 'De Stijl', established by the cooperation of Van Doesburg, Van Eesteren and Rietveld, while executing Léonce Rosenberg's commission. Rietveld had worked out the project a year before and he supervised the actual building in 1924. Here one of the masterpieces of 'De Stijl' was created, a building which even today, after thirty years, not only impresses the spectator by its clarity and open structure, but which since its construction has remained the paradigm of a new conception of building. Oud had previously initiated in his early projects on paper what Rietveld now realized in this building - a completely elementary creation, a manifestation of architectural ideas; by the same means of expression Oud's blocks of houses at Hoek van Holland, dating from the same year, give a parallel of the development of the earlier phase of 'Stijl' architecture, and show the great influence of the analytical research done by the collective work of the three 'Stijl' members in the previous year. 1924 may therefore be considered as the year of the Rietveld house, the first - and unsurpassed - realization of 'De Stijl's' newly developed architectural principles; and, on the other hand, as the year of this first realization on a large scale of 'De Stijl's' principles in their social context: Oud's Hoek van Holland blocks. +*pl. 36, 37* aant. aant.

In 1924, Van Doesburg lectured at Prague, at Vienna and at Hannover. There, he met the painter Vordemberge-Gildewart, saw his work and invited him to join 'De Stijl'. From this year also, date Van Doesburg's studies, in collaboration with Van Eesteren, for a new type of city, where traffic is directed along

specially constructed viaduct roads. These projects are of great importance, as they imply the first efforts of ‘De Stijl’ in the direction of town planning.

In painting, there are new results of Van Doesburg's further development of the rigid theory of neo-plasticism: his ‘counter’-composition, now in the Municipal Museum at Amsterdam, is the first work pointing in the new direction. In this canvas a scheme of composition based on diagonal lines is at first employed. This painting starts a new phase in the evolution of both Van Doesburg and ‘De Stijl's’: Van Doesburg calls it ‘Elementarism’. *pl. 42*aant.

As regards the realizations of the group in other centres, Kiesler's design for the Vienna theatre exhibition (ill. *De Stijl* VI, pp. 140, 143, 145, 147) must be mentioned. The activities of the group have been further augmented by the fact that the musician George Antheil joins the group and publishes his ideas on musical composition in the review.

The theoretical work of ‘De Stijl’ is enhanced by the publication of Mondriaan's book *Neue Gestaltung* (a translation of his *Neo-plasticisme* and of several articles published in *De Stijl*) and of Van Doesburg's *Grundbegriffe der neuen gestaltenden Kunst* (a translation of his articles in the *Tijdschrift voor Wijsbegeerte* of 1919). Both appeared in the series of the Bauhausbücher.

1925.

The most important event in this year is Mondriaan's leaving ‘De Stijl’. This happened mainly on account of Van Doesburg's version of neo-plasticism, which developed towards the new tendency he was to call ‘elementarism’, that is to say the use of the diagonal in a rectilinear composition. For Mondriaan the principles of neo-plasticism and their philosophical and speculative implications had become so much a part of his existence, that he could not forgive any heresy. Van Doesburg, on the other hand, could not forget that Mondriaan had not sufficiently expressed his disapproval at the exclusion of ‘De Stijl’ from the exhibition of decorative arts in Paris 1925.

This fact in itself was not very important: the Dutch Government and the commission appointed for the organisation of the Dutch participation had not invited ‘De Stijl’ as Van Doesburg might have expected. But this exclusion meant that ‘De Stijl’, and therefore the most radical movement of nonfigurative art, was not presented by the country of its origin, but that its principles were applied elsewhere, for instance in the Austrian pavilion, designed by ‘De Stijl’ member Kiesler. The fact caused a violent commotion among the collaborators of ‘De Stijl’ and the people who sympathised with them and it became an indirect incentive for organising all those whose work had been refused for the official contribution. ‘De Stijl’ and its work was one of the most important items in the exhibition ‘L'art d'Aujourd'hui’, organised in December 1925 in the gallery in the rue Ville l'Evèque in Paris. The members of ‘De Stijl’ exhibited their recent work and for some, as Vordemberge-Gildewart, the exhibition was a welcome opportunity to come to Paris in order to contact the assembled members of the group. Vordemberge, who had up till then lived somewhat apart, exhibited four of his paintings and practically joined in the work of ‘De Stijl’ from that time on. *pl. 45*aant.

In painting Van Doesburg's new development of the diagonal is presented in this year's most important work, the 'counter-composition 1925', now in+ The Hague Municipal Museum. The diagonal pattern is emphasized by heavy black lines, +*pl. 43*aant. such as Mondriaan had employed hitherto in his paintings. On the other hand, Mondriaan seems to have taken up Van Doesburg's challenge: in his composition of 1925, now in possession of Ir. Cabos at Utrecht, he tackles the problem of the diagonal. Using a square canvas, but held at an angle of 45°, so that it rests on one of its corners, he arrives at a composition which still is entirely based on the fundamental equilibrium of horizontal and vertical lines. Why he stuck with such persistence to this pre-established scheme, will have to be discussed is a later chapter.

In the field of architecture, several important facts have to be noted. The first trend of 'Stijl' architecture produced two important buildings by Oud: his restaurant 'De Unie' in Rotterdam, since destroyed by the war, which was one of the purest specimens of architecture according to the early principles of 'De Stijl' and his 'Kiefhoek' settlement at Rotterdam. The new tendency of 'Stijl' architecture, on the other hand, developed more consequently towardsurbanism: Van Eesteren, realizing that a satisfactory solution for the single house in a town could never be found, as Oud had clearly stated in the first issues of *De Stijl*, attacked the problem of modelling a whole street. The occasion was furnished by an alteration in the lay-out of one of Amsterdam's principal streets. In view of the fact, that this alteration would change the street's entire function and aspect, it meant to Van Eesteren that the architect in charge had to create a new equilibrium by elementary means of expression. He published this solution in *De Stijl* VI, p. 161 sq., and 138 bis. In the same issue of *De Stijl*, p. 147 bis, are reproduced the projects for a shopping arcade with a restaurant, designed by Van Eesteren, in collaboration with Van Doesburg. Moreover Van Eesteren took part in a competition for a new project for 'Unter den Linden'+ in Berlin; he won the first prize. His plan, published in *Bouwbedrijf*, November 1925, +*pl. 39*aant. shows the same preference for a radical solution with elementary means, thus entirely recreating the aspect of a street according to its function, which has been precisely and scientifically analysed before. Out of these projects and experiments the new conception of town planning was born, a conception which could not have been achieved without the fundamental and essential experiences of 'De Stijl'.

1926.

This year's outstanding event is the constitution and theoretical justification of elementarism. The influence of the Italian review *Valori Plastici*, edited by M. Broglio, has to be stated in this context. Van Doesburg publishes an article *From composition to counter-composition* on p. 17 sq. of the seventh annual of *De Stijl*, and fragments of a manifesto on elementarism on p. 35 sq.. In 1929, when looking back on this period, he writes in his retrospective article: 'By the lively and most articulate evolution the principles, developed mainly by P. Mondriaan in *De Stijl* could not any longer be considered as generally characteristic of the opinion of the group. The realization becoming richer and

more manifold, we succeeded in enriching new domains; as a sum of the newly conquered insights and possibilities, elementarism was constituted. In the idea of "elementary design" everything we had acknowledged in our work as being essential and universally valid, from the very beginning until today was united.'[31]

Another excerpt may be quoted in this connection in order to explain the reason for Van Doesburg's alteration of the theory of neo-plasticism: 'Elementarism is born, partly from a reaction against a too dogmatical and often narrow-minded application of neo-plasticism, partly as its consequence and finally and chiefly from a rigid correction of neo-plastic ideas. Elementarism rejects the claim of absolute statics, which leads to obduracy and paralyses the creative powers (.....). Elementarism's method of construction is based on the neutralisation of positive and negative directions by the diagonal and, as far as colour is concerned, by the dissonant. Equilibrated relations are not an ultimate result. Elementarism rejects the mutual balance of colours and of each colour to the whole (the classical principle of composition.)'[32]

Mondriaan's answer to this manifesto is not made until the next year: 'After your high-handed improvement(?) of neo-plasticism any co-operation is quite impossible for me (.....). For the rest *sans rancune*. Piet Mondriaan'[33], and in an article published in the Dutch review i *10* (edited by A. Lehning, Oud, Moholy-Nagy a.o.): 'As an opposition to nature can be created by these relations (horizontal-vertical) they have to be considered as the culmination of neo-plasticism.'[34]

Meanwhile, Van Doesburg had found occasion to apply the newly constituted principles to an important work. At the instigation of Hans Arp he was commissioned to rebuild and to redecorate the restaurant and dancing 'Aubette' at Strasbourg. The restaurant was located in an 18th Century building which happened to be listed as an historical monument; he therefore was not allowed to change the front or the arrangement of windows. The projects for this large and complicated work, made in collaboration with Hans Arp and Sophie Täuber-Arp, take up most of his time during this and the next year. He moves to Strasbourg, where he rebuilds a book-shop in the rue du Vieux Marché aux Poissons, and executes a few other commissions.

In Holland the activity of 'De Stijl' members is restricted - and even frustrated - by a lack of contact with Van Doesburg. In 1926 Oud designs a project for the building of the Rotterdam Stock-Exchange, which is not awarded the first prize. In 1926, Oud's *Bauhausbuch* was published. Only one number of the review was published in this year; it contained recent work by Rietveld and Mrs. Schröder, who had become a member of 'De Stijl', as well as a painting[+] by Cesar Domela, who had joined 'De Stijl' in the same period. The literary activity of the group is strengthened by the participation of Hans Arp, whose poems are published but who did not join 'De Stijl' is his quality as a painter or as a sculptor.

[+] *pl. 44* aant.

1927.

The year 1927 brings the 10th anniversary of 'De Stijl' and thus creates an opportunity for looking back on the past decade, as well as considering the

work of purification and renewal accomplished by ‘De Stijl’. Van Doesburg publishes a number of *De Stijl* entirely dedicated to this purpose. He has every reason to be jubilant, as the efforts and successes of ‘De Stijl’ were to a great extent if not his work, at least due to his activities. When summing up the results, he stresses once more the recent development of the principles: ‘The demand for purification of the means, at first consistently formulated by “De Stijl”, has become a fact. It is therefore useless to claim it as a base for further evolution, as there is no possibility of further evolution without it. In a further evolution of plastic principles, in elementarism, this purity of means is presupposed; therefore in the new stage of plastic expression (which only began in 1924) the development of pure means of expression is not the aim but, on the contrary, the point of departure.’[35]

He looks back on the evolution of ‘De Stijl’ as a group and as an activity: ‘From “De Stijl” as an idea, “De Stijl” as a movement was gradually developed. And the latter has expanded rapidly from year to year; while it was originally constituted by a small, almost sectarian, timid group, this “group” is now for a greater part dissolved and supplanted by fresh forces and “De Stijl” clearly and internationally comes to light as a claimant.’[36] And in opposition to possible limitations and dangers, he formulates his outlook on the future: ‘If the idea of “De Stijl” were limited to a completely dogmatic and purely static conception (Mondriaan) it would not only exclude the possibility of development, but it would shrivel and in times to come be considered a barren document of human error, owing to lack of vitality. The idea of “De Stijl”, however, as I intend it, as a “mouvement perpétuel” of our creative powers, has an unlimited meaning; the idea of “De Stijl” on the other hand as a limiting dogmatic system of thought and production is meaningless, today and in the future.’[37]

This is the vitality which was at the base of Van Doesburg's resumée and behind his outlook on the future. In ‘De Stijl's’ jubilee number he publishes a series of documents proving the influence and the expansion of ‘De Stijl’ and its important contribution towards the shaping of our contemporary world.

Besides the anniversary, 1927 brings few new realizations of ‘De Stijl’ principles. Van Doesburg is still at work at Strasbourg, Van Eesteren has been appointed lecturer on town planning at the Weimar Academy of Architecture. Of the architecte only Oud has an opportunity of realizing his ideas, i.e. in the houses of the ‘Weissenhof-Siedlung’ at Stuttgart and in the completion of the villa ‘Allegonda’ at Katwijk, which he had started in 1917.

The group of ‘Stijl’ members was reinforced in 1927 by the sculptor C. Brancusi and by the poet Hugo Ball, who died only a short while later. Brancusi did not adhere strictly to ‘De Stijl’ principles but the great sympathy for the pure and elementary work of the sculptor induced van Doesburg to include him in the group of collaborators. In the anniversary number on p. 59, Van Doesburg prints a table, showing the development of ‘De Stijl’ and its members. The list shows an important change in the 10 years of its existence. But the essential and characteristic nature of ‘De Stijl’ which remained unchanged is contained in the words, printed on the left of the list: ‘And it goes ever farther and farther.’

1928.

This year sees the completion of the work on the Strasbourg 'Aubette'; the most important and the most complete realization of the new principles of 'De Stijl', and a work of great significance. It shows convincingly that the organization of space, colour and its expert repartition can be as important as the architectural possibilities are. It must therefore be deeply regretted that this work of the very first importance has been destroyed and that it remains extant only in the photographs published by Van Doesburg in the issue of *De Stijl*, dedicated to the Aubette, in 1928. They show the various rooms and aspects of the building, the most important halls such as the large festival hall and the cinemadance hall; this was executed by Van Doesburg, while some of the other rooms were decorated by Arp and his wife, Sophie Täuber-Arp. The cinema-dance hall is the most striking achievement of all; Van Doesburg organized the mural+ space of this large room by a composition of diagonally arranged rectangles, covering the three walls of the room and the entire ceiling, (*De Stijl*, the Aubette number, p. 19 sq.) This composition is somewhat reminiscent of his counter-composition+ 1925, now in the The Hague Municipal Museum, (ill. *De Stijl* VII, p. 42) but rather more vigorous and with a verve which, up to that time had been unprecedented in the annals of *De Stijl*.

+*pl. 47*aant.

+*pl. 43*aant.

Back in Holland, the former architects of 'De Stijl' executed two important buildings, which could not have been conceived without the underlying influence of 'De Stijl' principles. Jan Wils built the Olympic Stadium for the 1928 Olympic Games and Oud designed the small chapel for the Reinstated Apostolic Community in his Kiefhoek settlement in Rotterdam, a work of great purity and unusual simplicity.

1929.

After the completion of the Aubette, Van Doesburg returns to Paris and in Paris again becomes the centre of 'De Stijl'. There he intends to intensify and to expand even more 'De Stijl's' future activities. For this purpose he commences the construction of a studio, where he intends to teach the principles of elementarism and where there will be an opportunity for collective work of 'De Stijl' group. He designs the plan for a house, to be built near Meudon-Val-Fleury, near Paris, with the aid of Van Eesteren. In painting he develops the principles of elementarism towards his 'simultaneous composition' in which a movement of lines co-operates with a different composition of colour and planes.

In 1929 Van Eesteren came back to Amsterdam, as he had been appointed chief civil engineer of the town planning department of Amsterdam. The other members continued their activities, there was not much mutual contact and only a single number of the review was published.

1930.

The building of the studio at Meudon nears completion. While waiting for the removal and the founding of a new centre of 'Stijl' activity, Van Doesburg concentrates again on painting. He develops the principle of his latest simultaneous composition and arrives at substituting the diagonal by a mere oblique: 'simultaneous counter-composition 1930', illustrated in the last number of *De Stijl*, p. 12. Having abandoned this quest, which he must have considered

as too arbitrary and uncertain, he started in search of more certainty and an absolutely objective and controllable way of expression. Via his experiments during this year he arrived at the arithmetical composition of 1930 (ill. *De Stijl*, last number, p. 13).

The general activity of the group in 1930 was rather restricted; Van Doesburg had attempted to form a small union of Parisian painters and sculptors who all subscribed to the principles of abstraction, the group was to be called 'Abstraction-création'. A periodical of this group, under the title of *Art Concret*, had already been published by Van Doesburg with the collaboration of Carlsund, Tutundjan, Hélion. Forgetful of his old feud, he had already invited Mondriaan to join them and received this characteristic answer from the latter: 'Though I do, of course agree with the principles you have mentioned, I am returning the paper unsigned as I do not want to belong to a group. A group of people with one aim is not as yet a single-minded group and as this does not exist, a consistent group remains impossible. And a larger group only makes sense for joint exhibitions and for spreading ideas. I will therefore not participate in the other group either, but I have promised my collaboration in this respect. If you definitely want to form a group, you can always invite myself and others who are proved to be suitable. Only on such a basis I will collaborate with the other group as well.'[38]

1931.

The Meudon studio - to be the centre of the new 'Stijl' activity - was ready in the early winter. But Van Doesburg lay ill at home and had to recuperate at Davos for an asthmatic complaint from which he had been suffering for years, and there he died on March 7th 1931. His death was the end of 'De Stijl' as a movement, a group and a review. The last issue of the periodical was published in January 1932 as a memorial number dedicated to 'De Stijl's' founder and leader, the last works, such as the house in Meudon and the last pictures are published in it. But from the articles, written by the then members and former members of the group, one fact emerges clearly: 'De Stijl' as a movement, an idea, as a programme will survive.

Now that we have established the principal facts, we can consider the structure of the group and the biographies of its members. We can scarcely describe 'De Stijl' as a group, for the necessary stability was sadly lacking. Now and then members resigned, others again, quietly disappeared from the circle, while others joined and after a short time left again. Even the contents of the review are not always a reliable record of the composition of the 'group', as some members did not feel inclined to writing.

'De Stijl' can at best be compared with a kind of planetary system: the most important point was its centre, and that centre had always been Van Doesburg. This fact had its advantages as well as its drawbacks. The enormous advantage was the fact that Van Doesburg had identified himself with 'De Stijl' he *was* 'De Stijl', with all his incredible energy, creative powers and resource. He really 'drove' 'De Stijl' from its very beginning, and it is quite understandable that 'De Stijl' as a movement, as a concentration of people did not survive him.

The disturbing aspects of Van Doesburg's leadership however, were due to the same fact, i.e. that he had identified himself with ‘De Stijl’. The fact by itself is true and can be proved by a number of incidents. Van Doesburg was the only one who cared for the editing of the numbers of *De Stijl*, who paid for the printing, who corresponded with the members - he was the only one who knew them all personally. But still, the psychological effect of this fact sometimes became disturbing; although he considered himself, and was in fact, the servant of his ideas he could not always restrain his explosive and dynamic temperament. Some of the disputes, which estranged more than one of the original members of ‘De Stijl’, were partly due to the authoritative attitude which, in all fairness, he was probably entitled to take. But his dynamic and stirring temperament, the spontaneous and violent quarrels it could evoke, sometimes made it difficult to accept his leadership, though it was never actually contested by anyone.

Van Doesburg knew that he was the ideological founder of ‘De Stijl’ and its driving force. But he was sincere and open-hearted enough to admit of the merits of his collaborators. He writes: ‘Though I know perfectly well that the idea on which “De Stijl” was founded as a movement and as review has not been the private property of any person - since the atmosphere of ideas, whereín a movement can succeed has to be present, as in a revolution - yet the embryo of what was realized five years later, in the idea and in the periodical *De Stijl*, was at the base of the thought I had formulated in 1912: strip nature of its forms and you will have style left.’[39] And in the same issue ‘Though the international spreading of the idea of “De Stijl” has been entirely the idea of the editor and his alone, “De Stijl” as a collective striving after style, was only possible as a group.’[40] He does not have to pretend to have launched ‘De Stijl's’ own type of abstract painting: ‘Though various artists in different countries have worked consciously or unconsciously in order to realize a new way of plastic expression, the painter Piet Mondriaan was the first to realize, in 1913, by a consistent elaboration of cubism, this new plasticism as a painting.’[41]

The other members of the group have always acknowledged his leadership and have been conscious of the fact that ‘De Stijl’ and Van Doesburg were identical. Van 't Hoff, the avant garde architect, who left ‘De Stijl’ as early as 1919, writes in the memorial issue: ‘Van Doesburg has died - and as he and “De Stijl” have always been essentially one and the same as the group's efforts, we feel the need to meet together in this last number. Van Doesburg and “De Stijl” - inseparable from each other, will keep their importance by the spirit which emanated from him and his work. For here was indeed question of a spirit, a spirit in search of new relations of life. Everyone who carries this spirit and enters the existing circumstances as Van Doesburg did so forcefully, will come up against these circumstances and not always gently. So Van Doesburg and “De Stijl” have both led a life of constant commotion.’[42] Van 't Hoff wrote these lines after Van Doesburg's death, but even during his life the fact of his leadership was acknowledged: Peter Röhl, one of his pupils at the Bauhaus, when sending his congratulations on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of

'De Stijl', tried to explain Van Doesburg's unique position: 'I discern the strength of Van Doesburg in the versatility of his creative activity. There may have appeared, during the period of evolution, stronger individual personalities in the various branches of art, but in the totality and the conclusiveness of the spirit, Theo van Doesburg surpassed even the most eminent members of this movement.'[43] This little sketch is the key to Van Doesburg's personality and to his success. Indeed, his genius consisted of the fact that he could arrange into a pattern facts and ideas which did not only seem to be different, but even quite contradictory. And this pattern, by his singular vivacity always remained alive, changing, full of sense and meaning. He never contented himself with a ready-made solution, he always went further. Thus Van Eesteren could write in the memorial issue: Van Doesburg was a renewer of life. He lived in a world that was only accessible to a few. Van Doesburg and Mondriaan, two figures not as yet fully understood, have each in his own way endeavoured to disclose the new pattern to their fellow men. Mondriaan in his quiet and static way, Van Doesburg dynamically as he expressed himself: 'By having the courage to renew life constantly by destruction, by continually destroying our old self, in order to be able to build up a new self.'[44] And Anthony Kok, 'De Stijl's' essayist, who took the place of its philosopher and sage, has characterized Van Doesburg's role by means of an epigram: 'Van Doesburg and Mondriaan are the two pillars that form the porch to a new world. It was he (Van Doesburg) who brought Mondriaan to the place which he now occupies with honour. It was he who time and again has filled us with enthusiasm.'[45]

This inspiring quality, this contagious vivacity of the spirit was the key and the secret of Van Doesburg's personality and to some extent of the character of 'De Stijl' as well. These qualifies entitled him to the leadership of a group which counted many splendidly endowed members and these qualities enabled him to become the axis around which all the others gravitated.

Having examined 'De Stijl's' structure, we will now present short biographies of its members, before we start dealing with its origin and character.

1. Antheil, George

Born 1900, in the United States; composer, pupil of Ernst Bloch. One of the forerunners of modern movement in music; reverts later on towards neo-classicism. Works in Hollywood, composer of music for Paramount Pictures.

2. Arp, Jean

Born in Strasbourg, 1887, painter,poet,above all sculptor.
1907 Studies at Weimar.
1907-08 Académie Julian, Paris.

1912 Contact with Kandinsky and the ‘Blaue Reiter’.
1914 In Paris, contact with Apollinaire and his friends.
1916 One of the founders of Dada in Zürich.
1919 In Cologne, with Max Ernst.
1921 Marries Sophie Taeuber.
1922 Resident in Paris, takes an active part in surrealism.
1926 Lives in Meudon.
1930 Concentrates on sculpture.
1931 One of the founders of ‘abstraction création’.
1940 Flees ta Grasse, Southern France.
1942-45 Lives in Switzerland.
1945 Return to Meudon.

3. Ball, Hugo

Born 1866 in Germany, writer and poet, one of the pioneers of expressionism. In 1916 founder of the review Dada in Zürich. Died 1927 in Locarno. His most important book: *Die Flucht aus der Zeit*.

4. Bonset, I.K.

Viz. Th. van Doesburg.

5. Brancusi, Constantin

Sculptor, born in Pestisani Gozj, Roumania,
1876, lives in Paris.
1894-98 Studies at Crakow art academy.
1898-1902 Pupil at the Bucharest academy.
1904-07 Works with A. Mercié in Paris, guidance of Rodin.
1906 Exhibition in Paris.
1907 Utter simplification of farms and abstract expression.
1920 His exhibition at the 'Indépendants' in Paris causes scandal.
1926 A proces is commenced against him by the American customs authorities, as they do not want to accept his sculptures as works of art. 1937-38 Travels to India; he is commissioned a work for a temple in Haiderabad: 'bird in the air'. Brancusi is the pioneer and forerunner of the abstract movement in sculpture.

6. Camini, Aldo

Viz. Th. van Doesburg.

7. Doesburg, Theo van (pen-name of C.E.M. Küpper)

Born at Utrecht, August 1883. Starled painting in 1899. First exhibition at the Hague, 1908. About 1912 works as an art critic for several periodicals, among others for 'Eenheid'. Called up 1914-1916, during first world war. Commences his collaboration with the architecte Oud and Wils in 1916. In this period group 'De Sphinx' with Oud. 1917 foundation of 'De Stijl'. In the same year

collaborates with Oud on a house at Noordwijkerhout. 1919, project for a monument. 1920, architectural projects at Drachten. 1921, visit to Berlin and Weimar. 1922, teaches at Bauhaus, Weimar. Dada influence and lecturing tour. Mecano.
1923 Exhibition of architectural projects with Van Eesteren and Rietveld at the Galerie de l'Effort Moderne, Paris, and later at the 'Ecole spéciale de l'Architecture'.
1924 Exhibition in Weimar, first studies in town planning. Commencement of counter-compositions.
1925 Architectural exhibition at Nancy.
1926 Publication of manifesto of elementarism. Is commissioned to reconstruct l'Aubette at Strasbourg.
1927 Construction of l'Aubette.
1928 Publication of the results of the Aubette project.
1929 Further development of elementarism; project for a house at Meudon. Becomes editor of 'l'Art Concret.'
1930 Lectures in Spain. First arithmetical compositions.
1931 Dies at Davos on March 7th.
Articles in *De Stijl*.
Publications: *De Nieuwe beweging in de schilderkunst, Delft*, 1917. *Drie voordrachten over de nieuwe beeldende kunst*, Amsterdam, 1919.
Grondbegrippen der nieuwe beeldende Kunst, Amsterdam, 1919.
(German translation: *Grundbegriffe der Neuen gestaltenden Kunst*, Bauhausbücher no. 6, München, 1924).
Klassiek, barok, modern, the Hague, 1920.
Wat is Dada? the Hague, 1924.
L'Architecture vivante, Paris, 1925.

8. Domela Nieuwenhuis, Cesar

Born at Amsterdam, 1900. Starts painting from nature, 1919-1922.
1922-1923 In Ascona and Bern; first attempts in pure plastic art and in constructivism.
1923 Participates in the exhibition of the November Group exhibition at Berlin, with non-figurative work.
1924-1925 In Paris, contact with Mondriaan and Van Doesburg.
1924 Personal exhibition at the Hague.
1925 Joins 'De Stijl'.
1927-1933 In Berlin.
After 1928 he turns, next to painting, to the technique of reliefs. He gradually draws away from neo-plasticism in search of subtler forms.
Moves to Paris in 1933 where he commences to make multi-coloured reliefs, using the contrasting effects of different materials. Publications in *De Stijl*.

9. Eesteren, Cornelis van

Born at Alblasserdam, 1897. Studies architecture at the Rotterdam Academy and town planning in Paris at the Sorbonne and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.
1921 Prix de Rome.
1922 First contact with Van Doesburg.
1923 Joins ‘De Stijl’, exhibits architectural projects with Van Doesburg in Paris; project for house on the river.
1925 First prize in the Unter den Linden competition, City of Berlin.
1927-1930 Lecturer in town planning at the Weimar Academy for architecture.
1929 Chief civil engineer-town planner to the City of Amsterdam.
1947 Professor at the Technical University at Delft.
1952 Head of the Department of Town Planning of the City of Amsterdam.
Honorary President of the C.I.A.M.
Publications in *De Stijl*.

10. Graeff, Werner

born at Wuppertal-Elberfeld, 1901. Joined the Bauhaus in 1921, where he was greatly impressed by van Doesburg's lectures. Concentrated on industrial designing and was in close contact with the Stijl in the years 1922-1923. Continued his technical studies at the Technical University of Berlin-Charlottenburg. Co-founder of the review ‘G’ with Mies van der Rohe and Richter. Press officer of the ‘Werkbund’ exhibition at Stuttgart in 1927, also edited the books on the Weissenhofsiedlung. Makes abstract films with Richter. Leaves Germany in 1934; returns there in 1951. Professor at the Folkwang-Werkkunstschule, Essen. Has created abstract murals.

11. Hoff, Robert van 't

born 1887 at Rotterdam, son of an eminent bacteriologist. Studied architecture. Visited the U.S. before world war I. where he was much impressed by Frank Lloyd Wright and his work Joined the Stijl after his return to Holland (in 1917). Built two important houses at Huis ter Heide in 1916. Left the Stijl in 1920. Now lives in England.
Publications in *De Stijl*.

12. Huszar, Vilmos

Born at Budapest, 1884. Studied in Studio Hollosy, Munich and at the School of Decorative Arts in Budapest. Lives in the Netherlands since 1905. Co-founder of ‘De Stijl’. Has designed stained glass and elaborated the application of ‘De Slijl’ principles to interior decoration projects. Left ‘De Stijl’ in 1923.
Lives at Hierden, Netherlands.
Publications in *De Stijl*.

13. Kiesler, Frederik

born in Austria, 1896. Contact with the Stijl in 1923; created the new Space theatre in Vienna, 1924. In 1925 demonstrated new spacial conception of housing and town planning in the Austrian Pavilion at the Great Exhibition in Paris; development of a new system of construction and tension in free exhibition units. Moved to the U.S. in 1926. 1933, Space house, New York City. 1937, Director of the Laboratory at the School of Architecture, Columbia University. Designed the ‘Hall of Superstition’ at the Galerie Maeght, Paris, in 1947. Lives in New York.

14. Kok, Antony

born 1S82 in Rotterdam, lived in Blerik and at Tilburg, since 1952 in Haarlem. Until 1943 he was employed by the Netherlands State Railways. He met van Doesburg in 1915, when they became close friends; these feelings being extended to the ‘Stijl’. He made contributions to the Stijl's literary propaganda. Kok was the model of Verwey's portrait studies ‘40X 1’.

15. Leck, Bart van der

Born at Utrecht, 1876, studied at the State School for Decorative Arts and at the Academy in Amsterdam.
1905 Illustrations for the ‘Song of Songs’, in collaboration with P.J.C. Klaarhamer. 1910 First realistic studies.
1911 Development towards the accentuating of the plane.
1914 Stained glass window ‘Mining Industry’.
1916 His stylisation reaches a culminating point in ‘The Tempest’ and ‘Harbourworks’.
1917 Abstract compositions, projects for an interior. Joins ‘De Stijl’.

1918 Designs interior of stand for Bruynzeel at the Utrecht Fair. First figurative compositions by elementary means.
1919 Makes studies in textile technique.
1928 Designs textiles.
1934 First attempts in interior decorating by means of the distribution of colours, (house at Hilversum).
1935 Makes his first studies in ceramics.
1940-1941 Book illustrations.
1949 Design and execution of interior in colours, Amsterdam.
1952 Design and execution in colours of canteen interior at a factory in Amsterdam.
Lives at Blaricum, near Amsterdam.
Publications in *De Stijl*.

16. Lissitsky, El (Lasar) Markovitch

Born in Smolensk, Russia, 1890.
1909-14 Studies engineering at Technical University, Darmstadt.
1914 Returns to Russia.
1919 Creates the 'Proun'; joins the constructivist group in Moscow, founded in 1913 by Tatlin.
1921 Professor at the State Art School, Moscow. Starts the constructivist movement in Germany with L. Moholy Nagy. Contacts with Van Doesburg and Mies van der Rohe: they start the group 'G'.
1922-23 Editor of the periodical *Der Gegenstand* in Berlin.
1923-25 Lives in Switzerland; founder of the group and the review ABC.
1925-28 Works in Hannover as a guest of the Kestner Gesellschaft; designs the cabinet of abstract art at the Landesmuseum.
1928 Return to Moscow; teacher of visual education at State School.
1941 Dies in Moscow.

17. Mondriaan, Pieter

Born at Amersfoort March 7th 1872. His first studies in drawing were made under the guidance of his father and an uncle.
1892-1894 Studies at the Amsterdam Academy.
1895-1907 Naturalistic period; landscapes around Amsterdam, copying in museums, scientific drawings for the Leiden University. 1908-1910 Moves to Domburg, (Zeeland). Comes under the influence of Jan Toorop. Simplification of means of expression, primary colours (pictures of dunes and towers). Symbolist period (viz. his triptych 'evolution').

1911 Moves to Paris. Influence of Picasso and Léger. Cubist period, (paintings of cathedrals, harbours and scaffoldings in a simplified cubist manner; colours grey, brown and blue).
1914 Is surprised by world war while on a visit to Holland.
1915 Further steps towards abstraction; plus-minus paintings.
1917 Complete abstraction. Founding of 'De Stijl'.
1919 Returns to Paris.
1920 Publication of Le *neo-plasticisme*.
1924 Publication of *Die neue Gestaltung*, (German translation of *Neo-plasticisme* and other articles).
1925 leaves 'De Stijl'.
1938 Moves to London.
1940 Bombed out in London, leaves for New York. Late period of 'New York City' and 'Boogie-Woogies'.
1944 Dies at Murray Hill Hospital, New York on February 1st. Publications: in De Stijl.
Neo-plasticisme, Paris 1920.
Neue Gestaltung, Munich 1924.
Plastic art and pure plastic art. NewYork, 1945.

18. Oud, Jacobus Johannes Pieter

Born at Purmerend, 1890. Studied at the School of Decorative Arts Quellinus and at the Amsterdam Rijksnormaalschool voor Tekenonderwijs, afterwards Technical University at Delft. Works with architects Stuyt and C. Cuypers, later with Th. Fischer, at Munich. Returns to settle as architect in his home town.
1913 At Leiden.
1915 Project for a public baths designed under the influence of Berlage.
1916 Houses at Velp and at Broek in Waterland.
1917 Holiday hostel at Noordwijkerhout and the villa 'Allegonda' at Katwijk. Becomes cofounder of 'De Stijl'. Designs the project for a sea esplanade - the first architectural venture inspired by 'De Stijl'.
1918 Becomes City architect of Rotterdam. Project for workers' standardized dwellings; first block of the Spangen settlement at Rotterdam.

1919 Project for factory al Purmerend; second block of the Spangen settlement.
1920 Blocks of the Tusschendijken settlement at Rotterdam.
1921 Leaves 'De Stijl'.
1922 Project for a country house near Berlin. Blocks of houses at Oud-Mathenesse, Rotterdam.
1923 Oud-Mathenesse, administr. building.
1924 Blocks of houses at Hoek van Holland.
1925 Restaurant 'De Unie' at Rotterdam, and blocks of the Kiefhoek settlement, Rotterdam.
1926 Project for the Rotterdam Stock Exchange.
1927 Weissenhoff settlement in Stuttgart, Gcrmany. Extension of the villa 'Allegonda' at Katwijk.
1928 Chapet at Kiefhoek settlement, project for a house at Brno, Czecho-Slowakia.
1931 Project for country house at Pinehurst, North Carolina, (U.S.A.); design for an interior for Jonkheer de Jonge van Ellemeet.
1934 Projects for a house for Mr. D. and another dwelling house.
1934-1936 Reconstructions of house for Dr. H.
1935 Project for studios at Hillegersberg.
1936 Country house at Blaricum.
1937 Interiors for the S.S. 'Nieuw Amsterdam'.
1938-1942 Office building for Shell-Nederland at the Hague.
1942-1943 Project for reconstruction of Hofplein at Rotterdam.
1947 Workers standardized dwellings.
1947-1948 Competitive design for the Head Office Royal Netherlands Steel Furnaces Co. IJmuiden.
1948 National Army Monument at the Grebbeberg, Holland; Office building for S.V.H., Rotterdam; project religious centre, The Hague.
1949 National War Memorial Amsterdam.
1950 Project for house at Bloemendaal, project for the reconstruction of the St. Laurenskerk of Rotterdam; office building for S.V.H. Rotterdam.
1951 Project Assembly-housc for provincial states of the province of South Holland at the Hague.
1943-1955 Spaarbank, Rotterdam.
1950-1955 Lyceum, The Hague.
1952 Project Bio-vacantieoord, Arnhem.
1954 Project Office building 'The Utrecht', Rotterdam.
Publications in *De Stijl*.
Holländische Architektur, Munich, 1926.
Nieuwe Bouwkunst in Holland en Europa, Amsterdam 1935.

19. Richter, Hans

Born in Berlin, 1888.

1912 First contact with modern art through the ‘Blaue Reiter’.
1913 During the Salon d'Automne, he gets in contact with Marinetti. Cézanne and cubism exert some influence on his art.
1916 First exhibition in Munich. Joins the Dadaist movement in Zürich.
1917 First abstract works.
1918 Through Tristan Tzara, Richter makes the acquaintance of Viking Eggefing, whose work shows n parallel development.
1921 First abstract film: rhythm 21, with Eggeling.
1926 Stops painting, devotes his time entirely to motion pictures.
1929-30 Organizes Berlin film League.
1933 Emigrates to France.
1941 Professor at City College, New York; director of the Film Institute.
1947 Realisation of ‘Dreams that money can buy’ in collaboration with M. Duchamp, F. Léger, M. Ernst, Man Ray and A. Calder.
1950 Exhibits his scrolls, a new type of plastic compositon, in various European galleries.

20. Rietveld, Gerrit Thomas

Born ut Utrecht, 1888, was working as a cabinet maker as from 1899. From 1906 onwards he works as a designer for jewellers (gold, silver, jewels and medals.)
Studies theory aided by P.J.C. Kiaarhamer. 1918 Produces first wooden furniture after his own designs; he joins ‘De Stijl’.
1920 Improves on his wooden constructions.
1923 Co-operates with Van Doesburg and Van Eesteren.
1924 Builds house at Utrecht after his own plans. This is the first realization of ‘De Stijl's’ architectural principles.
1928 Block of houses at Utrecht.
1934 Designs sets of furniture.
1953-54 Netherl. Pavilion Biennale Venice.

21. Severini, Gino

Born in Cortona (Italy) 1883; lives in Paris.
1901 Studies in Rome, contact with Boccioni and Balla.
1906 Comes to Paris: friendship with Modigliani and Braque.
1910 Signs the manifesta of futurism, meets Picasso.
1915 Turns to neo-classicism.
1917 Contact with 'De Stijl'.
1930 Reverts to a more decorative form of cubism.
1950 Prize at the Biennale, Venice.

22. Schröder-Schräder, Madame T.

born at Deventer, 1889; studies at the Technical University of Hannover. In close collaboration with Rietveld from 1924 onwards. As early as 1920 she designed an interior with Rietveld to demonstrate the new principles of space. Her own house at Utrecht designed jointly by Rietveld and herself, is the outstanding monument of the new conception.

23. Vantongerloo, Georges

Born at Antwerp, 1886. Studied at Brussels and at Antwerp Academy. After having been wounded early in the first war, he comes to Holland, where he is interned.
1917 First abstract sculptures; joins 'De Stijl'.
1919 Brussels, sculptures; the 'interrelation of masses'. He moves to Mentone.
1921 Leaves 'De Stijl'.
1924 Publishes his book 'L'Art et son avenir'. First production of sculptures based on mathematical formulae.
1927 He moves to Paris.
1929 Study for a bridge over the river Scheld.
1930 Project for an airport.
1931 Vice-President of the group 'Abstraction-Création'.
Lives in Paris.
Publications in '*De Stijl*'.
L'art et son avenir, Antwerp, 1924
Paintings, sculptures, reflections, New York, 1948.

24. Vordemberge-Gildewart, Friedel

Born at Osnabrück, Germany, 1899. Commenced to paint in 1919, his work being non-figurative from the very beginning.
1919 Settles in Hannover, where he is in close contact with Kurt Schwitters.
1924 He is invited by Van Doesburg to join ‘De Stijl’.
1925 Exhibits with the other members of ‘De Stijl’ at the exhibition ‘L'Art d'aujourd'hui’ in Paris. Since 1931 he is a member of the group Abstraction-Création.
1936 Moves to Berlin.
1937-1938 Works in Switzerland.
1938 He moves to Amsterdam.
1953 Professor Hochschule Neue Gestaltung Ulm.
Besides his activities as a painter, he is engaged in typographical designing and writes poetry.
Publications in *De Stijl*.

25. Wils, Jan

Born at Alkmaar, 1891. Studied at Amsterdam, made some trips for study purposes to Germany. Begins his architectural career in the studios of Mullers and Berlage. He is finally established as an architect at the Hague.
1916 Co-operates with Van Doesburg.
1917 Joins ‘De Stijl’.
1919 Designs and carries out the reconstruction of the hotel ‘De dubbele Sleutel’, at Woerden.
1920 Papaverhof at the Hague.
1920 The Protestant Church at Nieuw Lekkerkerk.
1921 Blocks of houses at Daal en Berg.
1922 Centrale Onderlinge.
1926 Apartment house, Josef Israelsplein, the Hague.
1928 Olympic Stadium at Amsterdam.
1930 OLVEH building, the Hague.
1935 The City Cinema, Amsterdam.
Publications in *De Stijl*.

Eindnoten:

5 *De Stijl*, Anniversary number, p. 59-60
6 *De Stijl, I*, p. 1
7 Mondriaan, Letter to Van Doesburg, November 20th, 1915, Stijl catalogue, 1951, p. 71
8 Mondriaan, Letter to Van Doesburg, 1915(?), Stijl catalogue, 1951, p. 71
9 *Neue Schweizer Rundschau*, 1929, p. 42 (Van Doesburg)
10 Mondriaan, Letter to Van Doesburg, 13/II/1917, Stijl catalogue, 1951, p. 72
11 *Neue Schweizer Rundschau*, 1929, p. 373 (Van Doesburg)
12 *De Stijl*, Anniversary number p. 5

12 *De Stijl*, Anniversary number p. 5
13 *Neue Schweizer Rundschau*, 1929,p. 45/46 (Van Doesburg)
14 *Neue Schweizer Rundschau*, 1929, p. 43/44
15 *De Stijl*, Anniversary number p. 6
16 *Neue Schweizer Rundschau*, 1929, p. 172 (Van Doesburg)
17 *De Stijl, II*, p. 4
18 *De Stijl, II*, p. 4
19 Mondriaan, Letter to Van Doesburg, May 17th, 1920, Stijl catalogue, 1951, p.72
20 *De Stijl, III*, p. 49
21 *De Stijl, III*, p. 84
22 *Neue Schweizer Rundschau*, 1929, p. 377 (Van Doesburg)
23 *Neue Schweizer Rundschau*, 1929, p. 536 (Van Doesburg)
24 Van Doesburg, Letter to Kok, January 7th, 1921, Stijl Catalogue, 1951, p. 45
25 *De Stijl*, Anniversary number p. 103
26 Van Doesburg, Letter to Kok, February 24th, 1921, Stijl Catalogue, 1951, p. 45
27 *De Stijl, IV*, p. 123/126
28 *De Stijl, V*, p. 178
29 *De Stijl, VI*, p. 91
30 *Neue Schweizer Rundschau*, 1929, p. 537 (Van Doesburg)
31 *Neue Schweizer Rundschau*, 1929, p. 540 (Van Doesburg)
32 *De Stijl, VII*, p. 82
33 Mondriaan, Letter to Van Doesburg, December 4th, 1927, Stijl Catalogue, 1951, p. 72
34 i 10, no. I, 1. 1927, p. 17 (Mondriaan)
35 *De Stijl*, Anniversary number p. 4
36 *De Stijl*, Anniversary number, p. 5
37 *De Stijl*, Anniversary number, p. 3
38 Mondriaan, Letter to Van Doesburg, 1930 (?), Stijl Catalogue, 1951, p. 72
39 *De Stijl*, Anniversary number, p. 4 sq.
40 *De Stijl*, Anniversary number, p. 6
41 *De Stijl, V*, p. 177
42 *De Stijl*, last number, p. 45
43 *De Stijl*, Anniversary number, p. 103
44 *De Stijl*, last nr., p. 51
45 *De Stijl*, Anniversary number, p. 34

3 the origins of de Stijl

'De Stijf's' origins in art history

Having at our disposal a chronological scheme of 'De Stijl's' activities as well as the necessary biographical material about its members, we are entitled to examine the process which ultimately resulted in the foundation of 'De Stijl' and in the creation of a trend of abstract work which was unprecedented and which raust be considered as an original - but equally logical - result of a constellation of facts and trends which have to be examined in this chapter. The rise of a trend of abstract art, basing itself entirely on the elementary means of expression (straight line in opposition, horizontally and vertically disposed, primary colours, primary non-colours) results from an intricate historical evolution which is by no means limited to the history of art. But, as we are considering a phenomenon in the domain of the arts, our investigation should start with the artistic aspect of the process of evolution.

'Just as we see a gradual development of the New Plastic Art, of an art of

nothing but relations out of the art of painting which was bound to nature in its subsequent schools we see its development just as well in the evolution of the founders of the New Plastic Art. We see their striving as a process of disengaging themselves from the indefinite (the visual appearance of things) and of arriving at the pure creation (beelding) of the definite (equilibrated relations). Still rendering the indefinite, we see them already attracted towards those aspects in nature by which the definite (equilibrated relations) is definitely manifested, in which relation is still veiled, and we see them exaggerating these aspects (by visual means). Is it mere caprice, that they found a suitable subject in an unforeshortened (non-perspective) view of a farm-house with its mathematical disposition of planes (large doors and repartition of Windows) and its basic colour, in order to express their sentiment for the positive delineation of definite relations? (.....) Is it so surprising that, while painting, they absented themselves more and more from the natural appearance, in order to emphasize the integral relations? And that, consequently, the composition resulting from their efforts, was far more mathematically than naturally disposed?'[46] This is, what Mondriaan writes about the origin of 'De Stijl'. He links up the individual evolution of the painters of 'De Stijl' with the general trend of evolution, which he considers logical and inescapable. He professes the existence of a tendency in modern art which, withdrawing further and further from nature, reaches its culminating point in neo-plasticism. And he stresses the fact that the painters of 'De Stijl' have covered that ground before arriving in 1917 at the decisive point when they constituted 'De Stijl' and achieved the first results in neo-plastic painting.

We therefore have to investigate the individual evolution of the painters of 'De Stijl' until we arrive at the decisive point where their three paths converge and the high road, 'De Stijl' begins.

The important fact about this development is, that the three painters of 'De Stijl', Van Doesburg, Van der Leck and Mondriaan, each originally had his own special corner in the field of plastic art and so were able to furnish different contributions to their common cause, 'De Stijl'. As we follow the evolution of the three painters, we shall see that 'De Stijl' occupies a very specific and privileged geographical position on the map of contemporary painting.

We will begin our investigation with Mondriaan, as he is the oldest of the group. His starting point was the conventional realism he had absorbed at the Amsterdam Academy, where August Allebé was forming a generation of painters according to the realistic style in which he excelled. But already in his early works, as in the still-life of 1893 (coll. of Mr. Rauch, Amsterdam Memorial Exhibition, nr. 3, repr.) there is a tendency towards the static and well-balanced arrangement. He has a preference for painting in atmospheric conditions which tend to efface the individual forms and emphasize the general outline. 'I often sketched by moonlight - cows resting or standing immovable in flat Dutch meadows, or houses with dead, blank windows. I never painted these things romantically, but from the very beginning I was always a realist.'[47] These lines are revealing, and a painting like his 'landscape with willows', approx. 1900(coll.

Mr. Bruin, Amsterdam Memorial Exhibition, nr. 6, repr.) might be considered an illustration of this description. A tendency to emphasize the horizontal lines is very obvious, and the repetition of the vertical scheme of the trees acts as compositional counterweight. It may even have been this rigid composition to which he alluded when stressing the fact that he 'never painted these things romantically'. The romantic school, in the Netherlands, implied a frequent use of the diagonal composition and of receding depths, accentuated by vivid and expressive brushwork. Perhaps the lines quoted above were written to draw the line between the Dutch romantic tradition and Mondriaan's earliest period. His colour too, is quite different from that of the romantic school: the deep but somewhat opaque colours are sometimes reminiscent of the work of his contemporary, the painter Suze Bisschop Robertson.

The first turning point in Mondriaan's evolution occurred about 1908, when he moved to Domburg in Zeeland. At the same time, he saw and admired the work of Dutch painters who represented the modern trend. When I first saw the work of the Impressionists, Van Gogh, Van Dongen and the Fauves, I admired it. But I had to seek the true way alone.[48] His contact with the movements in modern art had hitherto been very restricted, so the work of Van Dongen and Jan Sluijters, who had just starled to employ primary colour in the way of the Fauves, must have made a great impression on him. But the predominant influence during these years was that of Jan Toorop, the leader of Dutch symbolism and of the 'Jugendstil'. Toorop's art and that of his followers, was a conscious reaction against naturalism: lts means of expression were a clear predominance of line - undulating, very elaborate lines, giving to the canvas the aspect of a complicated textile pattern - a tendency to represent every object in its maximal extension, by an arrangement parallel to the plane of projection. Mondriaan had seen the results of Toorop's work and he always retained a deep admiration for his older friend. Yet, the achievements of Toorop did not influence him directly. He may have become more conscious of the need for simplification, but he certainly did not become a follower of Toorop. 'The first thing to change in my painting was the colour. I forsook natural colour for pure colour. I had come to feel that the colours of nature cannot be reproduced on canvas. Instinctively I felt that painting had to find a new way to expres the beauty of nature'.[49] Works like the 'dunes' (1909, coll. of Mr. Slijper, Memorial Exhibition, cat. nr. 43, repr.), the 'church tower' (coll. Mr. Slijper, Amsterdam Memorial Exhibition, cat. nr. 38) and the 'windmill' (coll. Mr. Slijper Amsterdam, Memorial Exhibition, cat. nr. 27) demonstrate this feeling. And already they announce another change in Mondriaan's work: the tendency to gravitate towards the centre of the canvas; a clearly centripetal tendency. A later period shows the emphasized development of this trend, but it is already present in the work of the Domburg period. The paintings tend towards an oval form, by leaving the corners more or less bare, by allowing them less importance. There is a striving towards linearism as well, but it is not as pronounced as in the work of Jan Toorop. The later works of the Domburg period (church tower and dunes, mentioned above) show a greater importance

of line, and consequently, the desire to render the objects in their full extension.

Thus, towards the end of his stay in Domburg, the painting of the dunes, dating from 1909, avoids all illusion of foreshortening, and arranges the subject entirely on the plane of projection. The possibility of doing this and the resulting idea of tranquility and monumental grandeur must have been the reason why Mondriaan chose to paint these subjects.

There is however, one item in Mondriaan's work where a slight influence of Toorop's symbolism may be discerned: his large triptych, called 'evolution'. But this influence does not go rauch beyond the mere fact of a symbolical representation and the symbolism in this canvas is of quite another kind than that of the pronouncedly Roman-Catholic themes of Toorop. The essence of Mondriaan's work is influenced more by his contacts with theosophy and its formal rendering stresses the importance he attaches to the aesthetic and symbolical qualities of pure, deep colour.

The decisive turning point in Mondriaan's evolution occurred in 1911, when he left Domburg for Paris on the friendly advice of Conrad Kickert, the painter and art-critic of the newspaper *De Telegraaf*. There, he comes into contact for the first time with the living movement of modern European art, a movement he could only have followed in a vague, reflected fashion while living in Holland. 'It was during this early period of experiment that I first went to Paris. The time was around 1910 when Cubism was in its beginnings. I admired Matisse, Van Dongen and the other Fauves, but I was immediately drawn to the Cubists, especially to Picasso and Léger. Of all the abstractionists (Kandinsky and the Futurists) I felt that only the Cubists had discovered the right path; and, for a time, I was much influenced by them.'[50]

This cubist influence, developed during 1911 and 1912, is easily traced in two series of paintings: still-life compositions (Amsterdam Memorial Exhibition,[+] nrs. 48 and 49[aant. aant.], both in the collection of Mr. Slijper, reprod.) and the series of six paintings, based on the theme of an apple-tree (Amsterdam Memorial Exhibition, nrs. 50-55, respectively in the collections of Mr. Heybroek, Elout Drabbe, The Hague Municipal Museum and Mr. Slijper, all repr.). The former two paintings were executed in 1910, the latter series in 1911. Mondriaan's rendering of the subject withdraws more and more from the natural appearance as he endeavours to come gradually closer to the essential formal qualities of his subject. The most striking fact about the still-life composition is the daring way in which Mondriaan succeeds in uniting the manifold details onto the plane of projection by avoiding all foreshortening and illusionary depth. From the spacial arrangement of objects (first canvas) he arrives at a carefully calculated balance on the plane (second version). The obliquely arranged paint-brush in the left foreground, for instance (first version) has had its meaning entirely changed on the second canvas: it no longer leads towards the depth, but contributes towards establishing a linear pattern gravitating towards the centre of the canvas. *[+]pl. 7*

The desire to bring the object into the plane of projection is even more noticeable in the development of the series of canvases of apple-trees. There is,

however, an essential difference between the two themes, which may account for the difference in approach: a still-life is of itself a man-made composition, whereas an appletree is an object, shaped by nature and therefore demanding an additional effort of transformation. The tree therefore, had to submit to various and consecutive stages of transformation, until it had been reduced to its essential and characteristic forms. We are in the privileged position of following the elimination of nature's capriciousness by Mondriaan and viewing the results of this process of purification and simplification.

There are, apart from the purification and the intensive analysing of the subject, other aspects in Mondriaan's work of this period which connect it closely with Cubism. In the first place, there is a tendency towards oval composition; the essential parts of the painting are concentrated on an elliptic surface, leaving the corners of the canvas without much importance. This leaning towards centripetal composition has already been noted in the last work of the Domburg period; it is further developed now by the Cubist influence, and will increase more in years to come. In the second place there is the fact that Mondriaan is so absorbed by his search for form and line, that he discontinues his own evolution of colour. His paintings of the Paris period are composed in shades of light brown, blue, yellow and grey, with an occasional touch of a pale red. All these colours are broken and subdued; he follows to some extent the colour-scale of the early cubists who based the colour composition of their paintings on a predominant use of ochre. The fact of Mondriaan's adopting the cubist colour-scale for his studies in form may be considered less surprising when we recall that most of the cubist painters, like Mondriaan, had passed through a stage of fauvist colourism, lasting till 1907: Picasso and Braque employed primary and violent colours just as much as Mondriaan, independent of their influence, did in or about the year 1908. They all abandoned their experiments in colour, they all reverted to a subdued and neutral scale, as the use of primary and violent colour would have hampered their search for form and structure. It is interesting to consider that Mondriaan, though far from the centre of European art, passed through exactly the same stages of development.

Mondriaan, gifted as he was with a singularly consistent temperament, pursued his experiments further than any of his fellow-cubists. The reason for this persistence will be found in his philosophical and theoretical opinions, which will be examined later. Anyhow, he did not content himself with a satisfactory aesthetic and formal arrangement of his paintings, a mere perfection of composition, he strove to express and to render visible, by means of his paintings, the very essence of reality, which was only hidden and distracted by accidental form.

‘It took me a long time to discover that particularities of form and natural colour evoke subjective states of feeling which obscure pure reality. The appearance of natural forms changes, but reality remains. To create pure reality plasticaly, it is necessary to reduce natural forms to constant elements of form, and natural colour to primary colour. The aim is not to create other particular forms and colours, with all their limitations, but to work toward abolishing them in the

interest of a larger unity.'[51] These experiments to reduce natural forms to their very elements occupied the years from 1911 to the beginning of the first world war and even longer. But there is a clear and obvious progress in these experiments, a process of increasing purification. First of all, the swaying curls, which are still visible in the 1911 - last - version of the apple-tree, are straightened and become rectilinear or circular fragments. At least, they approach mathematical distinctness. In his composition of 1912 such curves are rare and nearly absent. They finally disappear during 1913; his compositions of that year are constituted by straight lines and a few almost semicircular curves. During 1913, as+ well, the oblique line is gradually done away with. 1914 brings Mondriaan to the culminating point in his cubist experience: compositions of an oval shape, in vertical and horizontal lines; a few semicircular shapes occur in these paintings. A drawing of this type, together with its preliminary study, were reproduced in the first volume of *De Stijl*, p. 109 and drew admiring comments from Van Doesburg. The final drawing is erroneously dated 1917. The preliminary sketch shows the genesis of the other drawing: the front of a cathedral was the motif which had inspired Mondriaan to execute this composition (viz. his letter to Van Doesburg, p. 12). +*pl. 8*aant.

In 1914, Mondriaan went back to Holland for a visit to his relatives. There, the world war surprised him and he could not return to Paris until 1919. The event somewhat disturbed his plans but it did not interfere with the logical and consistent development of his art. Mondriaan pursued his studies and arrived at even further purification: 'I remained there for the duration of the war, continuing my work of abstraction in a series of church. façades, trees, houses, etc. But I felt that I still worked as an Impressionist and was continuing to express particular feelings, not pure reality. Although I was thoroughly conscious that we can never be absolutely "objective", I felt that one can become less and less subjective, until the subjective no longer predominates in one's work. More and more I excluded from my painting all curved lines, until finally my compositions consisted only of vertical and horizontal lines which formed crosses, each separate and detached from the other. Observing sea, sky and stars, I sought to indicate their plastic function through a multiplicity of+ crossing verticals and horizontals.'[52] This stage of development is most clearly represented in the masterly work of 1917 'composition in line' (coll. Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller; Amsterdam Memoral Exhibition, cat. nr. 79). This consists of such 'crosses' in a rhythmic arrangement, within an oval shape. Inspiration for this canvas was derived from the sea and the pier at Scheveningen. +*pl. 9*aant.

From the very moment that, in Paris, he felt attracted by Cubism, Mondriaan's evolution shows a continuous line up to this point. This line of evolution has been described by Mondriaan: 'Gradually I became aware that Cubism did not accept the logical consequences of its own discoveries; it was not developing abstraction towards its ultimate goal: the expression of pure reality.'[53]

Gradually, as well, Mondriaan put into effect the trend he had become aware of. The early 1917 paintings, in their sober simplicity, are the culmination of his

experiments towards a further abstraction of Cubism. They do not, however, break away from two essential characteristics of Cubism: the law of composition and its colour scheme. Composition as yet obeys the cubist law of the concentration of form towards the middle of the canvas. The 1917 paintings are still oval-shaped, indicating thereby the principle of a centripetal composition. On the other hand, colour is not a primary means of composition. The large 'composition in line' mentioned above, is practically monochrome, and the other paintings of the same year only show colour as an assisting factor in composition. There is a definite gap in the development between this painting and the other one, of the latter half of 1917, reproduced in the first volume of *De Stijl* as plate VI (now in the collection of the Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Amsterdam Memorial Exhibition, cat. nr. 80).

+ *pl. 12, 16*aant. aant.

The actual moment, indicating in Mondriaan's development the interstice between these two works, may be fixed as being the summer of 1917. It coincides with the dates, mentioned at the beginning of our first chapter, as the date of birth of 'De Stijl'. The new tendency in the work of Mondriaan does not only coincide with the birth of 'De Stijl', the two facts are actually identical. And we must first regard this event as a moment of spiritual short circuiting between various people - the result of which was a complete re-orientation of their art and their research. A few existing papers may throw some light on this course of events, which took place in complete privacy, unnoticed by anyone, except by those concerned. These papers originate from Mondriaan and they are confirmed by verbal testimony of Van der Leck. 'In 1915' Mondriaan writes, Theo van Doesburg, a Dutch painter and writer, was doing analogous research. Together we formed a small group of artists and architects: 'De Stijl' group (.....). We called our art 'de nieuwe beelding' or 'neo-plasticism'.[54] The other document, also by Mondriaan, was published in the memorial number of *De Stijl* after the death of Van Doesburg. 'On a visit to Holland, a fortnight before the outbreak of the war, I remained until its end and continued my research towards an art, liberated of natural aspect. As I had already (in concurrence with the divisionist and pointillist schools) suppressed the natural aspect of colour, the Cubists in Paris made me see that there was also a possibility of suppressing the natural aspect of form. I continued my research by abstracting the form and purifying the colour more and more. While working, I arrived at suppressing the closed effect of abstract form, expressing myself exclusively by means of the straight line in rectangular opposition; thus by rectangular planes of colour with white, grey and black. At that time, I encountered artists with approximately the same spirit, First Van der Leck, who, though still figurative, painted in compact planes of pure colour. My more or less cubist technique - in consequence still more or less picturesque - underwent the influence of his exact technique. Shortly afterwards I had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of Van Doesburg. Full of vitality and zeal for the already international movement that was called "abstract", and most sincerely appreciative of my work, he came to ask me to collaborate in a review he intended to publish, and which he was to call "De Stijl". I was happy with an opportunity

to publish my ideas on art, which I was engaged in writing down: I saw the possibility of contacts with similar efforts.'[55]

These documents give a decisive answer as regards time, place and persons concerned. We are already familiar with the persons: Mondriaan, Van der Leck and Van Doesburg. We know the date - Mr. van der Leck has been so kind as to confirm it - to have been the early summer, 1917. The place is Laren, where Mondriaan and Van der Leck lived at that period, and where Van Doesburg came to visit them. But in order to establish the condition of the 'spiritual short-circuit' we have to examine the respective artistic evolutions of Van der Leck and Van Doesburg. The work of Van der Leck, the senior of the two, should be examined first.

Van der Leck, too, started from the conventional realism, which he had been taught at the Amsterdam Academy. One of his first works, however, was not a work of free painting, but illustrating and designing a book (*The Song of Songs*), a task which he accomplished in collaboration with P.J.C. Klaarhamer, the architect, Rietveld's later teacher. This first achievement, dating from 1905, may well have given him a feeling for the plane, a taste for the two-dimensional approach. His early portraits, his landscapes and figurative compositions, show little inclination to make much use of perspective or suggest any depth. A typical work, the symbolic composition 'the farizees' of 1907 shows this tendency in full development. It indicates an influence of the same symbolist movement Mondriaan came into contact with a year later through his friendship with. Jan Toorop. Van der Leck's trend in symbolist art was, however, not acquired from Toorop, but Springs from the influence of Derkinderen, at that time professor at the Amsterdam Academy. 1910, the year before Mondriaan's move to Paris and his contact with Cubism, is a turning point for Van der Leck: he starts to develop and active interest in the social conditions of his surroundings, resulting in such compositions as 'leaving the factory' (collection of Museum Boymans, Rotterdam) and 'factory-girl' (collection of M. van Deventer). These works show an increasing tendency towards two-dimensional composition which is further emphasized in the work during the subsequent years. The series of pictures, based on army life, is a welcome opportunity to deploy a number of human figures on the canvas' surface, in rigid parallelism to the plane of projection, f.i. 'cavalry', 1911, (collection Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller). The tendency towards simplification of the form continues, all accidental form is suppressed, the remainder simplified to an almost geometrical pattern as in 'huckster' 1913 (coll. Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller) and 'market' 1913 (coll. Mr. J. Raedecker, on loan to the Municipal Museum, Amsterdam). The various figures are arranged into a frieze, bound together by the white horizontal plane and the superimposed vertical rhythms of the windows. In the same year, 1913, he shows for the first time a tendency towards mural art and its consistent simplification: several works, from now on, are executed on a kind of concrete with mural colours. This process of execution did not only advance the simplification of Van der Leck's treatment of form, at the same time it reduced his scale of colours to the minimal use of all non-primary colours.

1914 brought two important events in Van der Leck's artistic evolution: a journey to Morocco, where he studies the primitive mining industry, and the commission for a large stained glass composition in which he was supposed to use the results of his studies in Morocco. The drawings frorm Morocco (in the collection of the Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller) are almost geometrical abbreviations of machinery, of the pure and sober landscape, of the entrances to the mines, all executed with a subtle but careful pen-technique. The stained glass composition - of respectable dimensions (coll. Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller) - shows an almost geometrical rendering of the scenery and the human figure. It may be considered as the first important realization of a personal style which aims at the suppression of all accidental form and at the rendering of the subject in a precise, almost geometrically abbreviated language. The use of the straight line and its reduction to utter clarity is a logical consequence of this ambition. Three examples of the same year show a similar result: 'the cat' (coll. Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller), 'the foreman' (coll. Municipal Museum, Amsterdam) and 'beggars' (coll. Mr. J.E. van der Meulen). The following year sees this tendency increased and a further loosening of the pattern of forms achieved: the various parts of the composition detach themselves more and more from one another, and the rhythm of surface form is, as a result, liberated further still.

In 1916 Van der Leck reaches the culmination point of this trend: his two+ large masterpieces of the year 'the tempest' and 'labour in the harbour' (both in the collection of the Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller) show the point he has reached in his line of evolution. The two paintings are both organised into a rhythmic pattern by a sequence of elementary and precise forms. These forms are the geometrical abbreviations to which the complex reality had been reduced: in the painting 'harbour' (ill. *De Stijl* I, pl. 12) there are no curves at all, except one precise circle; the straight line dominates throughout the painting and creates a precision of language, which is still further emphasized by the exclusive use of primary colour. Every illusion of depth, every form of foreshortening has been carefully avoided - the painting is set in its surface, which it succeeds in organising precisely and convincingly. This precision of plastic language, this rigid (but definitely not frigid) accuracy of the organisation of the surface were qualifies, noted and set down by Mondriaan when he saw Van der Leck's work at Laren.

+*pl. 10*aant.

+The next work, the abstract 'composition' of 1917 (coll. Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller) dates from the period after the spiritual 'short-circuit'. It is closely related to Mondriaan's work of the same period and there is about as much difference between this work by Van der Leck and the previous one, as there is between Mondriaan's late cubist period of the beginning of 1917 and his 'composition' of the latter half of the same year. We have already analysed the difference between the two works by Mondriaan; we now have to examine the gap in Van der Leck's work between the beginning and the end of 1917.

+*pl. 15*aant.

Van der Leck, in his 'composition' has sacrified all subject matter and all associative context. He has abolished all diagonal lines as well (though he has not done so in another painting of the same year, repr. *De Stijl* I, pl. 1, where

diagonals and subject matter are still in existence). He has retained the precision of language and the principles of composition, the 'mural qualities' of his work: in opposition to cubist compositions, his work never showed a tendency to concentrate on a centre of gravity. And he has retained that open, detached arrangement of form on the surface, which is to be an important factor in his further development.

Van der Leck, less inclined to metaphysical reasoning than was Mondriaan, reverted to the use of subject-matter after about a year, and left 'De Stijl'. What he mostly cared for, was the constitution of an objective language, which excluded all individual caprice. He was only faintly concerned with the rendering and interpretation of 'pure reality'. But his research into the elements of an objective language, his experiment in mural art and in the use of geometric elements enabled him to contribute his share to the birth of 'De Stijl' and neo-plasticism. - Van Doesburg is the third - and youngest - of the painters of 'De Stijl': eleven years younger than Mondriaan, and seven years younger than Van der Leck. He started to paint in 1899 and had his first one-man exhibition in the Hague in 1908. The paintings exhibited there were still realistic in the way of the 19th Century Dutch tradition, but his brilliant approach and originality earned him a definite success. There are several portraits, studies of heads and still-life compositions, which show a free and dynamic handling. About 1910, he develops a personal variation of Fauvism, culminating in the portrait of himself of 1913 (coll. Mrs. van Doesburg), and 'girl with flowers' of 1914 (coll. Mrs. van Doesburg). His activity as a painter is restricted by his being mobilised during the period from 1914 to 1916. He serves in a regiment on the Belgian border, near Tilburg, and is therefore separated from the possibilities of working or seeing the work of others. But he reads a great deal in these years and he is very much impressed by Kandinsky's book on 'The spiritual in art', published in 1910, He is an ardent admirer of Kandinsky's Dutch follower, the painter De Winter at Utrecht, who had arrived at expressionist abstraction in 1914. He published an essay on De Winter in 1916: *De schilder De Winter en zijn werk* (The painter De Winter and his work; Haarlem, De Bois, 1916). In 1916, after his demobilisation, he starts painting again and his style has an entirely different aspect now: theoretical studies during the military years and, perhaps sketches, which are lost, have altered and matured his manner. But in the year 1916 he has obviously not yet found a definite style of his own. There are the expressionist abstractions, somewhat influenced by De Winter and, simultaneously, a still-life (coll. Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller) with a cubist way of composition somewhat reminiscent of Delaunay; there are also two paintings of dancers (coll. Mrs. van Doesburg), geometrical of form, but with a very dynamic movement and rhythm, which make them, in some respect, reminiscent of the somewhat earlier sculptures by[+] Archipenko. The important work of this period, 1916-1917, is his large work 'the cardplayers' (coll. Mrs. van Doesburg). The painting is indeed a synthesis of Van Doesburg's various experiments: it reduces form and colour to large and simple planes, but does not yet achieve elementary purity or precision of

[+]*pl. 11*[aant.]

language. On the other hand, its qualities are contained in its expressivity: it achieves that strange combination of reduced form and colour with personal expression, which we appreciate in some of the paintings of Delaunay and his German contemporaries.

When comparing this work with its later version (coll. of the Hague Municipal Museum)[+] or with another painting of the first half of 1918, (coll. Solomon Guggenheim Museum, New York), the difference is indeed striking, but perhaps not more so than in the case of Mondriaan and Van der Leck. The most remarkable fact, however, is the mutual resemblance between the three paintings of the latter half of 1917. [+]*pl. 13*[aant.]

Each of the three artists had arrived at the stage he had reached early in the year of 1917, in his own way: Mondriaan by way of Cubism and through his metaphysical search for pure reality; Van der Leck by the simplification of his mural art and the precision of language it demanded; Van Doesburg, in his turn, by his versatile experiments in the modern way of expression, by a sound critical reasoning which has always been his *forte* and a daring approach to the mentality of our time. When writing about the parallels between the trends of modern thought and the tendencies in modern art, he says: The serious reason why I assume these three stages of thought (1. purely abstract thought; thought for the sake of thought; 2. concrete thought, thought for the sake of observation and 3. a stage between these two: deformative thought) as a truth in regard to plastic arts, is the fact that we see these three stages of thought projected in plastic art - or, more precisely in the arts. Secondly, because I have passed in my own plastic evolution through these three stages within a period of twenty years.[56]

The reasons outside the domain of painting, which conditioned this 'spiritual short-circuit', that is, the birth of 'De Stijl' or 'neo-plasticism', will be examined later on in this chapter. What is important here, is to establish the elements of plastic history which fused at a certain moment in the year 1917 and by a species of chemical reaction produced a new and not previously experienced phenomenon: abstract art, based on the elements of straight lines in rectangular opposition, and primary colours. Thus the elements which were brought together at that critical moment in 1917 were as follows:

a. the cubist tradition in its most consistent form, that is to say the ultimate consequence of Cézanne's desire to reduce the natural form to its geometrical elements (Mondriaan);

b. the movement towards a renewal of mural and - or - monumental art promoted by the 'Jugendstil' (art nouveau), emphasized by the symbolists (M. Denis, Toorop, etc.). The roots of this movement may be traced back into the l9th century, to William Morris and Ruskin, who revived the Arts and Crafts, on one side - to traditional mural painting (Puvis de Chavannes) on the other. In the desire of the movement to create a precise and objective language of their art and to emphasize the surface, we feel the undeniable influence of Seurat. This factor in 'De Stijl's' origin and birth is mainly contributed by Van der Leck;

c. the theories of expressionist abstraction (Kandinsky and the 'Blaue Reiter'

> group) which in their turn find their starting point in a development of one aspect out of Van Gogh's art. The development of this line of evolution - which constituted the theoretical basis for the complete banishment of subject matter - was Van Doesburg's contribution to the formation of 'De Stijl'. The fusion of these three components resulted, by a kind of chemical reaction which we can only state as a fact, in 'De Stijl'. But this 'chemical reaction' was only made possible by a series of catalysing factors which - as they had nothing to do with the arts - have to be treated separately.

The fusion, however, did not prove to be very resistant: soon, it fell apart into its constituent factors: Van der Leck returned to subject-matter in 1919, using the newly developed system of the plastic elements as the precise language he had always wanted to employ. The collaboration of Mondriaan and Van Doesburg continues for several years: in 1919, under the influence of Van Doesburg's concise reasoning, they both develop a mathematically controllable[+] technique: dividing their square canvases into a system of smaller squares, and basing their composition on this exact pattern. From this stage (composition 1919, coll. Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Amsterdam Memorial Exhibition, cat. nr. 84), Mondriaan develops his mature, neo-plastic style, conditioned by his studies in rendering pure reality. He alters the squares to rectangles, and brings these rectangles into more definite relation by once again introducing colour as a factor in their relationship: 'to create unity, art has to follow not nature's aspect, but what nature really is. Appearing in oppositions, nature is unity: form is limited space, concrete only through its determination. Art has to determine space as well as form and to create the equivalence of these two factors. These principles were evolved through my work. In my early pictures, space was still a background. I began to determine forms: verticals and horizontals, became rectangles. They still appeared as detached forms against a background; their colour was still impure. Feeling the lack of unity, I brought the rectangles together: space became white, black or grey; form became red, blue or yellow. Uniting the rectangles was equivalent to continuing the verticals and horizontals of the former period over the entire composition. It was evident that rectangles, like all particular forms, obtrude themselves and must be neutralised through the composition. In fact, rectangles are never an aim in themselves, but a logical consequence of their determining lines, which are continuous in space; they appear spontaneously through the crossing of horizontal and vertical lines. Moreover, when rectangles are used alone without any other forms, they never appear as particular forms, because it is the contrast with other forms that occasions particular distinction. Later, in order to abolish the manifestation of planes as rectangles, I reduced my colour and accentuated the limiting lines, crossing them one over the other. Thus, the planes were not only cut and abolished, but their relationship became more active. The result was a far more dynamic expression.'[57] This is how Mondriaan arrived at his mature style, about 1920, the year in which he published his pamphlet *Le neoplasticisme*[+]. From then on, until his leaving Paris in 1938, he constantly and consistently purified and consolidated this style.

[+] *pl. 23, 27* aant. aant.

[+] *pl. 32, 33* aant. aant.

Van Doesburg, while developing his ‘elementarism’, described the essential features of this type of composition: ‘neo-plastic, peripheric composition. Very important, an essential renewal of the method of composition. Gradual abolition of the centre and of every passive void. The composition develops in opposite direction: instead of converging towards the centre, it tends to shift towards the extreme periphery of the canvas, it even seems to continue beyond it.’[58]

Van Doesburg leaves the consistent method of neo-plasticism about 1924, when he created his ‘elementarism’. In accordance with his dynamic temperament, he introduces the diagonal as an element of composition into the hitherto exclusive scheme. He explains his new principle by writing, in the same context as above: ‘Elementary (anti-static) counter-composition, adds a new oblique dimension to the rectangular, peripheric composition. This, in a realistic way, solves the tensions between horizontal and vertical forces; introduction of inclined planes, dissonant planes, opposing to gravity, architectural and static structure. In the counter-composition, the equilibrium of the plane plays a less important part. Each plane has its share of peripheric space and the construction should be regarded more as a phenomenon of tension than as one of relationship in the plane.’[59]

But, in spite of later changes, the constitution of the elementary means of composition - straight lines in rectangular opposition, and primary colour - was decisive. The creation of a new manner of plastic expression in 1917 was - and still remains - an important fact in the history of the plastic arts. Severini, the outsider within ‘De Stijl’ movement, realised this fact as early as 1919, when writing: ‘Now, for the first time, we have a plastic art that achieves the same relations as the work of Mallarmé.’[60] The consequences of this event have been manifold and of varying importance. The first reaction occurred in architecture - but as this first effect of the new shaping happened almost simultaneously and has some bearing on the constitution of the group and the review, it will be examined at this stage.

The first examples of ‘Stijl’ architecture resulted from the studies of the painters. Van Doesburg established this fact by writing in his retrospective article of 1929: Nobody need be surprised that these claims have been expressed first of all in painting. In Holland, indeed, painting had been for some centuries the sign of renewal. It is the form of artistic expression which suits the Dutch people best and therefore it was a most difficult task to put forward new claims in this field. The architects had an easier play. They had no historic traditions to fight.[61]

The first results of ‘Stijl’ architecture were, therefore, inspired by the study and the work of the painters. Their achievements, however, were made possible by two already existing trends in Dutch architecture and were preceded by some executed work, which already pointed towards ‘De Stijl’ conceptions of building. These two trends are: the development of Berlage's architectural conception, and the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright on Dutch architecture. Two important early monuments preluding ‘Stijl’ architecture are Robert van 't Hoff's two houses at Huis-ter-Heide (ill. *De Stijl* II, pl. 3, 5, 6 and pp. 30, 32 sq.).

Berlage's rationalism in architecture made a deep impression on his younger colleagues. It is Oud, who has been under the spell of the promises of this architecture. His project for public baths - 1915 - shows the influence of Berlage, though translated into a personal idiom: the tripartite porch, flanked by two gabled risalites, is clearly reminiscent of the entrance to the Amsterdam Stock Exchange, built by Berlage in 1903. And even his holiday hostel at Noordwijkerhout, in which Van Doesburg collaborated with him, shows signs of the developed Berlage-tradition by the consistent practice of a principle ofbrick-architecture. Oud, who studied in Germany with Th. Fischer in 1911 and knew the achievements of architecture in Germany and Austria (the Darmstadt school, A. Loos in Vienna, Behrens, Olbrich etc.) decided in favour of Berlage's conception because he recognized its affinity with the Dutch landscape and character and because at this time, his ideal was to create an objective style in architecture.

Contact with Van Doesburg and Mondriaan, however, made him adopt a more developed principle: he drew architectural consequences from the studies of his painter-friends. The first - an extremely happy - result of this inspiration[+] is his project for an esplanade above a beach (ill. *De Stijl* I, pl. 2 and p. 12). There, the principles of rectilinear and rectangular design are for the first time realised in architecture with sobriety and consistency. In the 1927 anniversary number, Oud describes the influence of the painters' ideas on his work: ‘By this collaboration (with the colleagues of the free arts) I succeeded in transforming, in architecture, the principles of the plastic arts. The result: cubist houses, interesting only through the effort to produce pure architecture, well-balanced proportions, straight lines, condensed forms; an altogether well constructed architectural complex from the aesthetic point of view, with interior vitality, which preceding architecture lacked completely.’[62] The next effort, which demonstrated even more consistently Oud's desire to realize plastic balance by the opposition of horizontal and vertical lines and planes, is his[+] plan for a factory at Purmerend (1919, *De Stijl* III, pl. 6) and a plan for a warehouse (1919, *De Stijl* III, pl. 12). It is the central part of the drawing for the factory in which he most convincingly succeeds in realizing the idea of a balanced rectangular opposition in architectural forms.

[+]*pl. 24, 25* aant. aant.

[+]*pl. 30* aant.

All the same it cost Oud years of strenuous, devoted work to progress from his initial designs for a neo-plastic architecture to the actual building. During that period, the collaboration with the painters, pre-eminently with Van Doesburg, had diminished. In Oud's plans during the ensuing years, Van Doesburg was asked to determine the colour-relations, but the actual architectural solutions were left entirely to Oud: the distribution of work between architect and painter, as laid down by Van der Leck, had become a fact for a short while. The building of the ‘Tusschendijken-blocks’ at Rotterdam (since destroyed) was the last result of this phase of ‘Stijl’ architecture - in 1921 Oud withdrew from ‘De Stijl’.

The other influences, which had assisted at the birth of ‘Stijl’ architecture were repercussions in the Netherlands of Frank Lloyd Wright's work. Robert van

't Hoff, who had studied in the United States, first brought this influence to his native country. His two houses at Huis-ter-Heide (1916, ill. *De Stijl* II, pl. 3, 5, 6, 17, commentary pp. 30, 32, ground plans p. 33) were a prelude to the architectural conception of 'De Stijl'. They had shown, in opposition to the then current opinion, that architecture could be created with satisfactory results, without any ornamentation whatsoever and by using nothing but architectural means of expression, i.e. planes, lines and the balance of masses. This thesis and its daring realisations by Van 't Hoff, were derived from the work of Frank Lloyd Wright. Van 't Hoff has commented on Wright's work in an article (*De Stijl* II, p. 40), called 'architecture and its development', choosing Wright's Unity Church (1909, *De Stijl* II, pl. 8) as an example for his thesis: 'Hereby Unity Church is once more brought to the foreground, because this architecture has been the forerunner of neo-plasticism in architecture, now in a state of development.'[63] In the first volume of *De Stiji* Oud had already discussed the work of Wright, especially the Larkin factory and the Chicago house of Mr. Robie, drawing attention to the fact that mechanical production played an important part in the results, achieved by Wright, principally with regard to the precision of architectural forms and their relationship.

Van 't Hoff, indeed, has realized the different problems, propounded by Wright: his two houses are constructions in concrete - i.e. entirely achieved by mechanical means of production, without any ornamentation. Their whole construction has been determined by the ground plan, leaving no architectural effects whatsoever to arbitrary variations. By doing so, he approached the theory, which 'De Stijl' was to formulate a year afterwards: objectivity in architecture. There is, however, in these two works an important feature, which is directly linked up with the works of Wright and which was opposed by 'De Stijl' from its very beginning: a predominating horizontalism. Wright's most characteristic buildings had derived their effects from this feature: a broad, horizontal repose, which dominated the secondary and vertical accents of his buildings. Both the houses by Van 't Hoff may therefore be considered as important forerunners of 'Stijl' architecture, as they had already realized architectural objectivity by means of conception and of production. They had, however, not acquired the spacial equilibrium which 'De Stijl' conceived in 1917. On the other hand, they are of great importance to the development of 'De Stijls' ideas, because they did draw the other artists attention to the fact that it was not only aesthetic equilibrium which would lead to a new architecture, but mechanical production as well, assuring the objectivity of construction and of execution.

The next step in the architectural evolution of 'De Stijl' was Jan Wils' reconstruction of the hotel 'De dubbele Sleutel' at Woerden, 1918 (ill. *De Stijl* II, pl. 10, pp. 59-60, commentaried by Van 't Hoff p. 58). The problem, there, was made more difficult by the fact that the existing ground plan had to be respected. In this building two earlier mentioned trends merge: Berlage's rationalized brick architecture and Wright's composition of broad horizontal repose. There is however, a new feature in this construction: the balance between horizontalism

and vertical accents has been aimed at and, to some extent, achieved. The vertical accent, by which the horizontal extension of the building has to be neutralized, is furnished by the building's high chimney, that acts as counterweight in a composition of accentuated cornices and the horizontal band of the balconies.

The development of the later type of 'Stijl' architecture is less related to the origin of 'De Stijl' and must be dealt with elsewhere in this study. However, it must be noted that the influence of 'De Stijl' on architecture in Germany, by way of the Bauhaus, should be attributed to this first trend of 'Stijl' architecture. The later phase which was not manifested until 1923 at the Paris exhibition, sprang from the development of a more recent period of study in the field of painting.

Before concluding this chapter, we must add a word on the evolution of sculpture within 'De Stijl' movement, that is to say, on the contribution of Vantongerloo. He felt attracted towards 'De Stijl' because of his marked predelection for mathematical research and composition. This inclination becomes clear from his very first contribution to the review, a comment on Archipenko's 'gondolier' with an elaborate mathematical analysis of the composition (*De Stijl* I, pl. 14, p. 134, pl. 16). His earlier work of the Hague period (1914 and later) does not immediately show this line of development: a 'head' of 1915(ill. Vantpngerloo, *L'Art et son Avenir*, pl. 7) and a 'fragment' (ill, ibid., pl. 8, and Vantongerloo, *Paintings, Sculptures, Reflections*, pl. 1), show the marked influence of his compatriot and companion in misfortune, the Belgian sculptor Rik Wouters, who like Vantongerloo, was an internee in the Netherlands. A painting, dated 1916 (Vantongerloo, *Paintings, Sculptures, Reflections*, pl. 2) executed in free and vivid brushwork, is also close to the paintings by Wouters of the same period, examples of which can be found in the Antwerp Museum. The mathematical disposition of the artist however, becomes obvious in a painting of 1917 (ibid. pl. 5) which shows a remarkable relation to Van Doesburg's still-life composition of 1916 in the Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller. It is a composition of circles and planes in a circle, achieving the same kind of abstraction as Van Doesburg's contemporary work. His sculpture 'Volendammer' of 1916 (ill. Vantongerloo, *L'art et son Avenir*, pl. 10) does not betray the same mathematical concern, except as regards the scheme of composition (ibid. pl. 16)[+]. His first abstract sculptures: 'spherical construction' 1917 (Vantongerloo, *Paintings, Sculptures, Reflections*, pl. 3) in the Philadelphia Museum of Art and[+] 'interrelation of masses' 1919 (ibid. pl. 6, 7) can therefore also be considered a personal development of the results achieved by the painters of 'De Stijl'.

[+] *pl. 18* aant.

[+] *pl. 29* aant.

'De Stijl's' philosophical origins

After examining the factors in the evolution of early 20th century art, which led to the constitution of 'De Stijl' and to its plastic production, we must bring our investigation to bear on the facts and the tenets which were the source of

'De Stijl's' ideology. As, in the case of 'De Stijl', ideology and plastic production are closely intermingled, we are not only concerned with the texts and philosophical expressions which were of some influence on 'De Stijl', but with 'De Stijl's' ideological and philosophical production as well. As we have seen before, (p. 11, introduction to the first number of *De Stijl*), Van Doesburg and his friends considered their ideological expressions an equivalent component of their plastic activity. And Mondriaan, in his fundamental article on the principles of 'De Stijl' looks at the problem thus: 'While the spontaneous expression, of the intuition, which achieves a work of art(in other words, its spiritual content) can only be interpreted by the art of the word, there still remains the word without the art, a reasoning, a logical explanation, by which the reasonableness of a work of art may be demonstrated. It is therefore possible indeed, that the artist of today speaks of his own art.'[64] And a parallel reasoning can be found in a book which had great influence on 'De Stijl' - as we will see later: Dr. Schoenmaekers *Beeldende wiskunde* (Plastic Mathematics, published in 1916 at Bussum); 'A new insight into relative objectivity is growing vigorously in mankind today. This new insight must be expressed first in words which explain the general and direct facts of nature. Then, our civilization will again contemplate the relativity of these facts as to the more detailed particulars of nature. And finally, a new plastic art will mutely express this contemplation. However, as long as our language has not yet clearly explained the new insight into the direct and general facts of nature, the plastic artists will have to try and speak in words. Being artists, they do realize what this new understanding needs most and they will speak in words, because the art itself is insufficient - as yet.'[65]

The complicated reasoning of 'De Stijl' finds its source in the fact that 'De Stijl' artists profess an entirely new conception of artistic creation. Van Doesburg's articles from 1912 on are based on the axiomas formulated by Kandinsky in his book *The spiritual in art* and he succeeds in expanding and broadening them. He and his friends in 'De Stijl' thus naturally empbasize the importance of 'the spiritual in art'. Naturally, by doing so, they also find their philosophical - allegiance to Hegel and his followers. Hegel's speculative universalism becomes part of their philosophic and artistic doctrine. 'Whatever happens in heaven or on earth - whatever happens eternally - the Life of God - and what is wrought in time, moves towards one aim; that the spirit be aware of itself, that it be objective to itself, that it find itself, is itself and at one with itself; it is a duplication, an estrangement, but in order that it may find itself, that it be able to know itself. Only in that way the spirit reaches its freedom; as only that may be called free that is not related to anything else, or dependent on anything else (Hegel). In the domain of technique, aesthetics, philosophy, religion and economy, this process of liberation is clearly expressed. As to the plastic expression of this process of liberation, it is only in neo-plasticism (de nieuwe beelding) that the spirit has gained its liberty by becoming determinate.'[66] It is Van Doesburg who thus describes the spiritual background of his conception, describing neo-plasticism as the plastic manifestation of the laws, elaborated by Hegel. And, when writing 'on the contemplation of new art', he quotes, as a

motto for his explanation, a sentence by Hegel, starting as follows: The finite is not true, nor is it as it should be: in order to give it existence, distinctness is needed.[67] His clearest appeal to Hegel is to be found in the same article, where he emphasizes his spiritual conception of the 'nieuwe beelding': 'The spirit is a thing infinitely higher than nature; in it, divinity manifests itself more than in nature. It must thus be understood, that all works which are wrought according to the spirit, must diverge from the external forms of nature and that they will diverge completely or rather less in the proportion in which the spirit has come to its distinction. This makes it quite clear that works as the ones reproduced here are not to be regarded sensually (materially)'[68]. The theory of 'de nieuwe beelding' is a further development of the theory of 'the spiritual in art', partly based on Hegel's precepts.

But there are other parallels and other sources. We have already seen (p. 48) that Van Doesburg draws the attention to the conformity of modern thought and the art of 'De Stijl'. 'In the essence of thought three stages can be discerned:

1. pure abstract thought, thought for the sake of thought;
2. concrete thought, thought for the sake of observation, and
3. a stage between the two, deformative thought. In pure abstract thought all sensual associative perception (nature) is absent. Its place is taken by the relation of ideas. This can be made visible in an exact (mathematical) figure, as practised in mathematics and as a number. In such figures, the notion, the content of pure thought becomes visible. In this case, where the content of pure presentive thought becomes an image (beelding), there is already a question of plastic (beeldende) contemplation.'[69]

And elsewhere he formulates the same idea as follows: 'Pure thought, in which no image based on phenomena involved, but where numbers, measurements, relations and abstract line have occupied its place, manifests itself by way of the idea, as reasonableness, in Chinese, Greek and German philosophy, and in the form of beauty, in the neo-plasticism (nieuwe beelding) of our time.'[70]

These two quotations hint definitely at some form of neo-platonic philosophy that Van Doesburg considers as being closely related to neo-plasticism. When looking back, in 1929, on the activities of 'De Stijl', he mentions in a footnote the philosophy of Dr. Schoenmaekers as the source of Mondriaan's terminology: 'This fundamental idea we expressed by the word "Gestaltung" (beelding) in the sense of creative achievement. The word "Gestaltung" had been revalued; it meant for us the superrational, the a-logical and inexplicable, the depth coming to the surface, the balance of interior and exterior, the spoils of the creative battle we fought against ourselves. A new terminology came into existence (*note*: Mondriaan's method of expression was based for the greater part on the new philosophy of Dr. Schoenmaekers *Plastic mathematics*) by means of which we expressed the collective idea, the moving spring of our common action. All art, acoustic or visual, sprang only from one idea: Creation (Gestaltung).'[71]

Schoenmaekers' philosophy was more than the mere source of Mondriaan's

terminology. It was - probably without Van Doesburg's knowledge - one of the catalysing factors which helped to weld the various tendencies into one distinct form: 'De Stijl'. This supposition will have to be proved by texts, taken from the two works in which Schoenmaekers set out his doctrines: *Het nieuwe wereldbeeld* (The new image of the world; published at Bussum in 1915) and *Beginselen der beeldende wiskunde* (Principles of plastic mathematics; ibid. 1916). But Mondriaan was not necessarily influenced by these particular books, though they are mentioned as being part of 'De Stijl' library in *De Stijl* II, p. 72. Both Mondriaan and Schoenmaekers lived, at the time, in Laren and we have verbal evidence, through the kindness of Mme Milius and of Messrs van der Leck, Slijper and Wils, that Mondriaan and Schoenmaekers saw each other frequently and had long and animated discussions.

What now, was the trend of Dr. Schoenmaekers' philosophy and of his system, which he called 'positive mysticism'? 'Positive mysticism', identical with 'plastic mathematics',[72] is a neo-platonic system of thought. Its author describes it as follows: 'Plastic mathematics mean true and methodical thinking from the point of view of the creator. Plastic mathematics mean: continuously to become aware of the creator's passion for manifestation, in order to contemplate his creation with equal circumspection.'[73] Positive mysticism teaches the laws of creation thus: 'We now learn to translate reality in our imagination into constructions which can be controlled by reason, in order to recover these same, constructions later in "given" natural reality, thus penetrating nature by means of plastic vision.'[74] Therefore it rejects completely nature's direct appearance: But a mystical insight, and certainly a positive, mystical insight is not concerned with any single fact as such. A positive mystical insight has even to describe a single fact as such as an 'illusion'.[75] Dr. Schoenmaekers' doctrine thus takes a very different stand from modern empiric science, although, as Schoenmaekers always takes care to emphasize, not a contradictory one, but merely on another plane. 'The perception of the empiricist describes, the contemplation of the positive mystic characterizes.'[76] So he arrives at his definition of truth: 'Truth is: to reduce the relativity of natural facts to the absolute, in order to recover the absolute in natural facts.' [77] This conception of truth is closely related to the human spirit-the driving force of both Schoenmaekers' and Mondriaan's conception of life: 'Our human instinct for thought is an instinct, not to be surpressed, for the absolute and for recognition; a conscious or unconscious belief in the absolute, that has to manifest itself in nature.'[78] This system of modern, mathematical universalism has its definite views on art as well: 'Is the expression of positive mysticism foreign to art? Not in the least. In art, it creates what we call, in the strictest sense "style". Style in art is: the general in spite of the particular. By style, art is integrated in general, cultural life.'[79]

It is not an accidental fact that Mondriaan, who had realized already in Paris, about 1911, that 'the appearance of natural things changes, but reality remains constant',[80] felt attracted towards this philosophy. 'Positive mysticism' claims that it enables its initiale to penetrate, by contemplation, into the hidden construction of reality. It accepts nature's direct appearance as a mere sym-

bolical truth, as a metaphor: 'Such a story, revealing a sense, is called a symbolical representation. But the same modern man, who gladly admits the symbolical truth of the Bible and will defend it against partial knowledge of mere facts and against specialized science, knows very little about the symbolical truth of nature. Symbolism is creation (beelding), it is a unity of interior and exterior aspects as, for instance, in a story. But the whole of nature is expressive fact and therefore the whole of nature is symbolical truth, as is the Bible. In plastic mathematics the symbolical truth of nature tends to come to precision.'[81] Thus, according to Dr. Schoenmaekers, 'we want to penetrate nature in such a way that the inner construction of reality is revealed to us.'[82]

This is exactly the end that Mondriaan saw before him when working in Paris. And Dr. Schoenmaekers' explanation of the relation between the mathematical figure and natural reality must have appealed to him: 'when we want to recognize some plastic figure in given natural reality, we should not ask first if it bears a resemblance (only representations are a likeness), but if its character coincides with the character of the given reality in nature.'[83] For Schoenmaekers, contemplation is a mystical quality of the greatest importance, which reaches the level of an artistic creation: 'Contemplation is absolutely not a "conclusion" of our intellect, nor a continuation of our understanding, but an entirely new knowledge, a revelation.'[84]

By these quotations, the close relationship of Dr. Schoenmaekers with the world of Mondriaan's thought has been indicated on general lines. A comparison of some selected quotations, however, will show that the relation is much closer than would at first appear. Schoenmaekers, when considering the relation of the creator and his creation, writes as follows: 'The unique creative force creates the surface of nature, as it tends to manifest itself'[85], and elsewhere: 'The unlimited unity of cosmic oppositions brings about the cosmos.'[86] On the other hand, Vantongerloo writes in *De Stijl*: 'Everything we see is the consequence of absolute existence. That is, what appears to our eyes and what we call nature. The consequences of the existence appear in nature under different forms, they have different expressions or physiognomies, different substances. From the absolute existence different natural facts come forth.'[87] In his *New image of the world* Schoenmaekers characterizes the laws of cosmic creation as being of a mathematical order: 'Nature, as lively and capricious as it may be in its variations, fundamentally always functions with absolute regularity, that is to say in plastic regularity.'[88] And Mondriaan, writing about neo-plasticism, says: 'Neo-plasticism is more mathematical than geometrical, it is exact.'[89]

Elsewhere, in the same work, Schoenmaekers writes: 'For Life, as a unity, is, in its deepest impulse, figurative; Life, as a unity, and in its deepest impulse, is built plastically and mathematically.'[90] And Mondriaan, in *De Stijl*, on neo-plasticism: 'Neo-plasticism (beelding) (.....) starts where form and colour are expressed (gebeeld) as a unity in the rectangular plane. By this universal means of expression, the versatility of nature can be reduced to mere plastic expression of definite relations.'[90a] And in his trialogue on neo-plasticism he answers the

question if indeed neo-plasticism can be justified with regard to nature: ‘If you could see that it presents the essence of everything, you would not have asked this question.’[91]

Another example: In his retrospective article of 1929, Van Doesburg quotes the ‘equations of Mondriaan: vertical = male = space = statics = harmony; horizontal = female = time = dynamics = melody, etc.’[92] By these equations, which could, if necessary, be continued, it is made clear that these most unobtrusive of all means of expression, in spite of their simplicity, are an essential, cosmic and living entity. We shall see, that Mondriaan attaches great importance to these equations as well as to the fact that the two series of notions form a chain of contradictions.

Schoenmaekers, on the other hand, sees the system of contradictions as a most important part of his doctrine: ‘Contraries are always related to one another in a way that can be reduced to the ratio of active and passive; “manhood” and “womanhood” for instance, are contraries, not oppositions.’[93] And in his system, he formulates another series of equations, strictly parallel: ‘space = concrete evolution = vertical; time = concrete history = horizontal.’[94] And he continues this series of contraries, when writing: ‘The absolute line characterises absolute time (....). The absolute ray characterises absolute space.’[95] By means of this series of contraries, he formulates a system of mystical dialectics: ‘Contraries are different parts of the same reality. They are only real in relation to one another. The line is actually line only in relation to the ray. And the ray is actually ray, only in relation to the line. So woman is only woman in relation to man; so man is only man in relation to woman.’[96] It is on this mystical and somewhat abstruse system of contraries, that Mondriaan builds up his theory of plastic opposition, one of the cornerstones of his doctrine: ‘Thus we see one idea manifest itself in all expressions of life - this idea has been formulated in logical thought. Long before any new feature had revealed itself in life or in art, logical thought had clearly demonstrated the old truth, that a given thing can only be expressed or known by its contrary. In this truth we find demonstration that the visible, the naturally concrete, cannot be known by the visible (nature), but by its contrary. This implicates, that the image of visible reality can only appeal to the present consciousness of time by way of abstractly-real expression.’[97]

By his theory of contraries, by his mystical form of dialectics, Schoenmaekers arrives at a system of cosmic law, which seems to have been a forerunner of Mondriaan's theories. We must be permitted to quote several excerpts from his theory: ‘The two fundamental, complete contraries which shape our earth and all that is of the earth, are: the horizontal line of power, that is the course of the earth around the sun and the vertical, profoundly spacial movement of rays that originates in the centre of the sun.’[98]

These mystical descriptions lead, in Dr. Schoenmaekers' system, to a qualitative - not a functional - difference between vertical and horizontal lines, and to the mystical qualification of their intersection - the cross - as a symbol. ‘Absolute contraries become visible as absolute ray and absolute line’,[99] and further: ‘The cross is above everything else a construction of nature's reality,

vaguely suspected for some time, and finally become visible... The more he will meditate about the construction of the cross, the more exactly the mysticist will see reality as a created fact (beelding)'.[100] For ray and line, vertical and horizontal movement, in Schoenmaekers' system are cosmic, creative forces, which manifest themselves everywhere, even in the slightest detail. 'The body is fundamentally visible as a figurative realization (uitbeelding) of the intersection of ray and line.'[101]

Now, a very similar theory may be found in *De Stijl*: 'De Stijl' - and by preference Mondriaan-considers the opposition of horizontal and vertical movement as the fundamental principle of natural construction; it also stresses the qualitative difference between vertical (ray) and horizontal (line) movement, 'Impression is movement. It cuts out. It is life. Contemplation goes on. It reposes.'[102] Thus Vantongerloo, who, owing to his taste for mathematics may have felt especially attracted to Schoenmaekers' *Plastic mathematics*, formulates his conception of the content of vertical and horizontal movement. But Mondriaan may also be quoted in this context: 'Thus the ray (radius), which is an inner fact and therefore invisible, is vertical line in plastic creation.'[103]

Dr. Schoenmaekers' trends of thought have certainly been stimulating for the constitution of 'De Stijl' principles. They do not only coincide with Mondriaan's plastic research, but they mark a decisive point in the development of Mondriaan's - and 'De Stijl's' - plastic means of expression.

On the authority of Schoenmaekers' theories, the exclusive predominance of the rectilinear and rectangular principle has, in any case, been facilitated. All the symbolical and qualitative implications find their way into the articles of Mondriaan, whose terminology - as Van Doesburg has noted - is entirely based on Schoenmaekers' work. These implications are obvious in Schoenmaekers' texts - they are rather less apparent in Mondriaan's articles. Schoenmaekers, in one of the decisive passages of his *Plastic mathematics* characterizes the two movements as follows: 'Movement in line is continuation, movement in the ray is rising, a rising which simultaneously expands (.....). The line "receives" its essence from the ray, it is passive (.....), the ray gives, it brings the line into existence, it is active (.....). The line is horizontal in essence, the ray is vertical in essence. The horizontal and the vertical are not characterized by direction but by essence (.....). The horizontal is characterized as a line: supple, receding, recumbent, continuous, passive, line. The vertical is characterized by the ray: tight, hard, standing, rising, expanding and active ray. The relation of line and ray is the relation between the external and the internal. It is plastic relationship: the interior ray exteriorises into line, or: line is ray, exteriorised.'[104] And by way of these plastic elements in the cosmos, Schoenmaekers builds up his central thesis: the primary importance of the cross, as being the prefiguration of our universe: 'The figure, which objectivates the conception of a pair of absolute entities of the first order, is that of absolute rectangular construction: the cross. It is the figure that represents ray-and-line, reduced to an absoluteness of the first order.'[105] Is it indeed exaggerated to assume, that Mondriaan followed this trend of reasoning, when writing on neo-plasticism: 'Is it, finally,

as arbitrary, that it abstracted, after having done away with all capriciousness, from curved lines also, and arrived at the most immovable, most definite figuration of equilibrated relations, that is to say the composition of rectangular planes?'[106]

This parallelism between Schoenmaekers' writings and Mondriaan's theoretic principles might be explained as a mere coincidence. But it can be demonstrated that Schoenmaekers' philosophical system does not only contain a prefiguration of 'De Stijl's' linear and spacial principles, but that it even includes certain passages on colourism which show a remarkable connection with the conceptions of 'De Stijl': The three principal colours are essentially yellow, blue and red. They are the only colours existing (.....). Yellow is the movement of the ray (.....). Blue is the contrasting colour to yellow (.....). As a colour, blue is the firmament, it is line, horizontality. Red is the mating of yellow and blue (.....). Yellow 'radiates', blue 'recedes' and red 'floats'.[107] This additional evidence excludes the possibility of a mere coinciding of the two theories; we can safely assume that Dr. Schoenmaekers' theories became one of the catalysing facts towards the founding of 'De Stijl', one of the facts that account for the change in work of the three painters towards the middle of 1917.

Schoenmaekers as well as the founders of 'De Stijl' considers reality as a chain of mutual relations which may be reduced to an absolute figure of intersecting vertical and horizontal movement. Schoenmaekers, when dealing with the positive mysticist's experience of reality, writes: 'he experiences nothing but ..... relations.'[108] And Van Doesburg, as he formulates 'De Stijl' painters' approach to reality, says: 'The artist thinks by way of relations.'[109] Mondriaan, in his turn, gives a mere argumentative account of the importance of relations for neo-plasticism, when writing: 'Equilibrated relations are expressed in nature by position, dimension and value of natural form and colour; in the abstract they manifest themselves by position, dimension and value of straight lines and rectangular planes of colour. In nature we can observe that all relations are dominated by one primordial relation: the relation of one extreme to the other extreme. Abstract representation of relations manifests this primordial relation by the duality of position, in rectangular opposition. This relation of position is the most equilibrated, as it expresses the relation of one extreme to the other in absolute harmony, comprising all other relations. When we come to see these two extremes as a manifestation of the interior and the exterior, we become aware of the fact that in neo-plasticism the link between spirit and life has not been broken-we will come to see that neo-plasticism is no denial of full life; we find that the dualism of mind and matter is reconciled in neo-plasticism.'[110] This was one of the aspects of the ultimate outlook of 'De Stijl' - and there again it coincides with Schoenmaekers' theories, which aim - as does every trend in mysticism - at the 'unio mystica' of spirit and matter.

We have considered, at some length, the relations between Schoenmaekers' theories and the ideology, the principles of 'De Stijl'. This relation is not only important because it shows a definitive influence of Schoenmaekers' theories

on the principles of ‘De Stijl's’ earliest phase - it also has some bearing on the later development of ‘De Stijl’, more especially as regards the elaboration of Mondriaan's views on neo-plasticism.

The aspect we bear in mind when mentioning Mondriaan's theories in connection with those of Schoenmaekers, is the utopian character of his conception. We do not mean to imply by this that the utopian aspect of Mondriaan's theories has been directly and exclusively derived from Schoenmaekers; there are other, though less distinct sources as well. Mondriaan's thought was influenced by Hegel's philosophy and even more so by Hegel's Dutch follower, Bolland, whom he quotes in various instances (*De Stijl* I, p. 103). Mondriaan was a member of the Dutch Theosophical Society, where he became acquainted with a philosophy, aiming at a realization of human qualities in a life, detached from everyday routine and practical concern. Last, but not least, he was brought up in an atmosphere of rigorous calvinism, with all the messianic implications derived from the Old Testament. But his contact, in Laren, with Dr. Schoenmaekers is of more importance, because it coincides with the decisive years of his evolution; its importance has been stated by many contemporary witnesses, and it can be traced through Schoenmaekers' and Mondriaan's writings.

In Schoenmaekers' *New image of the world*, the last chapter deals with redemption. It is there that we find the utopian conclusions of his system: ‘Our deliverance can only come through a plastic force (.....). He knows that deliverance is nothing but the dying away of our particular individuality, in order to be resurrected, to rise again as the all-embracing, the plastic personality, the all-human, in God-man.’[111] And elsewhere, in the same book, he writes about an unavoidable necessity, about the fact that the creative forces of his theory will create a new world, i.e. the object of his utopian speculations. ‘The positive mysticist knows for certain that this new world is a reality - as he knows with certainty just what the quality of contrasta is and what they are called upon to enact. But he cannot as yet contemplate the beauty of the new world in its unity and its versatility; he can but have a presentiment. And that presentiment is his happiness, his hour of ecstasy (.....). We can keep this experience as a certain expectation, that once and somewhere the contrasts, light and sound, shall create a new and everlasting plastic world (beelding) and that they cannot but do so, as they are contraries, cosmic contraries, part of the whole of plastic life of the world. This new plastic expression (nieuwe beelding) is of this world, it is born from light and sound. But it is a new earthliness, an earthly heaven.’[112] The astounding feature about this quotation is the fact, that we already find this expression ‘de nieuwe beelding’ in a text by Schoenmaekers, employed in a sense very near to the one, in which Mondriaan is to use it afterwards. It may thus be assumed, that Mondriaan did not only adapt the term ‘de nieuwe beelding’ from Schoenmaekers' writings, but that its content, its meaning and its intricate implication, its positive attitude towards life may also be traced back to the work of Schoenmaekers.

By the fact that such a great deal of Mondriaan's - and ‘De Stijl's’ - concep-

tions can be traced back to Schoenmaekers, we come to see ‘De Stijl’, its origin and its development in a somewhat different light. The origin of ‘De Stijl’ is not only a question of three different tendencies in painting which met and resulted in a new and unprecedented form of abstract art. And then too, ‘De Stijl’ is something else - and more - than the mere result of this coagulation of three separate tendencies of modern painting into a new trend. ‘De Stijl’ has to be considered as a philosophy as well, as a conception of life and of nature, and ‘De Stijl's’ artistic results are to be regarded as the plastic manifestations of this way of thinking.

‘De Stijl’, seen as a philosophy of life, as a vision of nature, apart from his artistic contributions, is Mondriaan's important share in the origin of the group. By adapting Schoenmaekers' theories in the field of painting and plastic arts, he created an opportunity for ‘De Stijl’ to be more than just one of the many other contemporary trends in painting. Both Van Doesburg and Van der Leck were less concerned with the philosophical aspects of ‘De Stijl’; Van Doesburg's main interest was directed towards a new and lively artistic movement as an interpretation of modern life; Van der Leck was chiefly concerned with the creation of an objective language in painting, exclusive of all individual, social or national limitations. It was Mondriaan, who constantly bore in mind the culture of what he called ‘the interior’: man's spiritual and intellectual qualities. He had an enormous confidence in the eventual maturing of these qualities, enabling man to arrive at a new conception of reality and of life by means of contemplation and abstraction. Neo-plasticism, ‘the new movement in plastic art’ (thus Van Doesburg had called his pamphlet) was to be the artistic expression of this ‘matured’ conception of life. We have to keep this idea in mind, when reading Mondriaan's explanation of ‘De Stijl's’ origin: ‘Now we are able to explain, why abstract-real expression (abstract-reële beelding) has not appeared until now. From its appearance we can conclude, that now only equality in the relation between the exterior and the interior, of the natural and the spiritual in man, has come into existence. This new relationship must give birth to a new style.’[113] And now the facts which made Mondriaan and his friends believe in a new, more mature age, able to create a novel style, will have to be considered.

The origin of ‘De Stiji’; the circumstances of its time

Mondriaan and his friends firmly believed that their period was a new and decisive one in the evolution of the world: an era, full of promises and possibilities for realizing a better human existence. Only traditional prejudices could still hamper the progress of mankind; the road of progress lay before them, and they had but to tread it: ‘We have seen the new being born: in all arts, it comes to rise, more or less. The old only causes damage in so far as it puts obstacles in the way of the new. It is only with regard to the new, that it does not count any longer. At a given moment, in the past, all the varieties of the old have been

new... but not *the* new. For let us not forget that we are at a turning point of civilisation, at the end of everything old; the separation between the two is absolute and definite.'[114] They hold an almost mystical belief in the achievements of their century: the 19th had laid the foundations by its inventions, by its researches, by the spreading and deepening of science; the 20th was to build on these foundations and to see the completion of the building. The beginning of the century had indeed produced inventions and achievements which seemed to change human conditions to a degree that we now can scarcely conceive: air-planes, telephone, wireless, the recording of sound, new and faster means of locomotion - inventions and achievements which must have, indeed, engendered the belief in a new and brighter future in a generation, witnessing all these innovations. From these facts, the artist developed a new approach towards reality: an optimistic belief in the faculties of human development, a new consciousness of a future which man could achieve by his own means: 'For the consciousness in the expressions of art is one of the features of the new of today: the artist is no longer the blind instrument of intuition. In a work of art, natural sentiment no longer prevails. It is an expression of spiritual sentiment, that is to say, of the union of reason and sentiment.'[115]

Of all the members of 'De Stijl' it is Oud who most clearly expresses this modern consciousness. His clear-cut view of the decade, its promises and possibilities, is probably due to the fact that, as an architect, he lived in close contact with practical reality, with the actual realization of ideas, that he, by his very profession, was less isolated in an ivory tower of speculative thought. Oud, by his character and profession, is a realist, and the fact of this different attitude is shown clearly in his articles in 'De Stijl' and in his other publications. It is shown, still more, in the development of his work. And owing to this faith in the progress of the faculties of the human mind, he could translate the first manifestation of 'De Stijl's' ideas into the everyday reality of human life.

In Oud's writings, this confidence in the achievements of modern life stands out clearly: 'In our present day, people talk a lot about modern ideas; too much, some people say. I cannot entirely agree. "Modern" ideas and facts, the facts and ideas of a period, but - at the same time - conditioned by that period, will at all times deeply move and violently agitate artists during periods of increased artistic effort. I do not believe in an automatism, by means of which - as if by itself - a style comes into existence. Style always suggests spiritual order, that is to say a spiritual volition, even though its intentional character is not always so clear as it is at the beginning of the Renaissance. Nevertheless one can admit that nothing is as relative and as transitory as a "modern" idea, the outer appearance of which is, and has to be, always different, according to its essential instability(.....). Individually growing ideas are "modern", collectively they are "new".'[116]

These ideas, which have come into existence by a collective growth, are termed by 'De Stijl' as 'the common consciousness of time' (het algemeen tijds-bewustzijn), and 'De Stijl' attaches great importance to them. 'Consciousness of the life of a period, and not its formal tradition, is the line of conduct of the

period's art.'[117] And this consciousness, in its turn, is conditioned by a number of different features; by the development of science, of technique, of labour, etc.

Van Doesburg, who had always been attracted by the results of science, emphasizes the important effect of science on the growth of this consciousness: 'Every form of expression in art grows, by necessity, from the period's spirit, and has to be explained by way of this spirit. Style comes into existence, when an equilibrated relation between interior and exterior conditions has been achieved by a common consciousness of life.'[118] But this 'spirit', this consciousness of life, has to be explained in its turn: 'Imagine living in a period, where it is generally accepted as a truth that the earth is flat and limited to its four sides. That this plane is immovable, etc. Isn't it obvious that the entire conception of life has to be in agreement with this supposition? And that the entire conception will change at the very moment a scientific experiment shows that the earth is a free, floating body and in constant movement? Thus every notion of God, of time or of space, is directly dependent on scientific experiment'[119]

This fact - the constant change of the 'consciousness of time' is, in its turn, reflected in art: 'The difference in form (Giotto-Picasso) proceeds from an entirely different relation of humanity to universal life. Our technique, our science, the whole of our culture, create an entirely different conception of the universe than the one manifested by Giotto.'[120] And Oud, sharing Van Doesburg's opinion, warns explicitly against an exaggerated appreciation of new forms without taking into account their spiritual sources from the 'new consciousness of life': 'Nothing is more inconvenient to the further development of new architecture than the attraction that the novelty of its dress possesses for superficial talents. Not the new forms are principally important, but the new attitude towards life, from which these forms emerge.'[121] And he finds the sources of this new attitude in the more practical realizations of modern life, the innovations which concern his daily activity as an architect: 'Spirit overcomes nature, mechanical production supersedes animal power, philosophy supplants faith. The stability of the old consciousness of life has been undermined, the natural context of its organs disturbed (.....). A new rhythm of life is in a state of genesis, a rhythm in which a new aesthetic energy and a new ideal of forms seem to be marked in broad outlines.'[122]

What are the features of this new consciousness of life? Mondriaan gives its general description in his first fundamental article in De Stijl. The text starts with a declaration on abstract life: 'The life of today's cultivated humanity is gradually turning away from natural conditions; it is becoming more and more an abstract life. Where the natural (outer) activity becomes more and more automatic, we see life's attention turn more and more towards interior values.'[123] This conception of abstract life is, for Mondriaan, one of the most important basic principles of 'De Stijl' and its ideology. in another article in *De Stijl* he formulates the same conception of a turning point in man's life, of an evolution towards the spiritual values, which. has been made possible by the achievements of the 20th century, and by a new social structure of human life, which was to

come into existence in the near future: ‘With a view to cosmic evolution, we can say: man today develops in the opposite direction, away from matter and towards the spirit (.....). The physical condition in general is an expression of spirit as well, though a lower one; but man is certainly a very special being among all existing things; in physical life he comes to a consciousness of self, he therefore exists as selfconsciousness too-next to, or rather in his ordinary life, there is a second life, an abstract life. We have to take this into account, if we want to arrive at a clear notion of art. In order to understand the evolution of art from the natural towards the abstract, we have to understand that man's evolution continues in those physical circumstances as a process of interiorisation.’[124]

This abstract feature, which Mondriaan detects in modern life, is also a reason for Oud to forecast an equivalent development in art, an evolution towards the abstract: ‘Life and art have acquired in our time another, a more abstract accent. By this fact, there is a livelier contact between the two than one would superficially be inclined to think. It becomes obvious through technique as well as through costume (.....). Thus, stress is no more laid upon the sentimental, the opaque, the sensually-pleasant, but on inner sensibility, on clarity, on the spiritual emotion, though these are more difficult to understand for today's complicated humanity. Not the more sensual values, such as tone, ornament, etc., but the more spiritual values such as relations, clear forms and pure colour must become the means of art’[125] The entire development of ‘De Stijl’ and of neo-plasticism is therefore based on the evolution of life, of man's attitude towards his environment, and the course of art is the parallel of the line of evolution of life. Not only that it has to be the parallel of this evolution: it must be, in the first place, a plastic expression of the new trends which have left their mark on the surface of contemporary life.

But these new features of modern life, when discerned, will have to be accounted for. What are the sources of this ‘new consciousness of time’, which in its turn had engendered ‘abstract life’? The origin - ‘De Stijl’ artists tell us - lies in the evolution of human society and one of the most important facts that change the face of human society is technique. ‘Life develops and man today uses different means than the man of yesterday. His knowledge of the motor has made him a different being, and he sees life from a different angle. As the organisation of human life has changed by the fact of evolution's progress, art, which is subject to the same law, cannot stand still, but its evolution is slow, for centuries it remained stationary before the means of the old plastic art. The means of yesterday are far removed from our era and from the life we lead.’[126] It is Vantongerloo who thus states the need for a renewal in art, as its way of expression no longer agrees with the general features of our time. He uses a charming metaphor to illustrate his ideas: ‘When we use the airplane, the engine will not lose its superb beauty, but its use will be reduced.’[127]

Life has indeed been changed by technique to a degree that following generations will never sufficiently be able to appreciate. Mechanical production has created new values, not only in its own domain, but in the general consciousness

of humanity: precision, accuracy, neatness are values of a spiritual order, which possibly are not created by technical development, but which owe their general validity in today's society to the spreading of mechanical production. Of all 'De Stijl' artists, Oud has most clearly realised this fact: 'In order to bring about a definite manifestation of the spirit, the means of expression have to be brought to distinctness first; and which of these is more definite and of our time than the machine? (.....) For the modern artist, the future conclusions will lead towards the latter, though at present people will still consider this idea an heresy. for it is not only a fact that the machine can produce more accurately than our hand, but it is obvious as well, that from a social, an economic point of view, the machine is the indicated means for the manufacture of products which will be of benefit to a community, more so than the artistic production of today, which only reaches a few rich individuals.'[128]

This social and artistic conception of technique is indeed a special feature of the first years of this century. It was on technique, that the optimism of an entire generation was concentrated. For the first generation of this century, technique and science were the two pillars of progress. Science and technique had enabled mankind to liberate itself from the limitations of nature and they would lead the way towards a not distant and even more glorious future. Science and technique had broken nature's domination over man and had enabled man, in his turn, to dominate nature. Science had analysed and established the laws of nature; without the knowledge of these laws, man is doomed to impotence. Once in the possession of this knowledge, he owns the means to use these laws against nature itself and to deliver humanity from its dependence on nature. By this knowledge he commands the means to force nature to work for him: technique has been developed out of science. And by technique, man is capable of intervening in the course of nature, to alter its course and to modify it to his advantage. The late 19th- and the early 20th century have seen the first results of technique, the first modifications of nature to man's advantage, and a whole generation has been impressed by these facts and has turned in admiration towards the people who had achieved what might be considered the first manifestations of progress: The St. Gothardt-tunnel, the first airplane, the phonograph and other 'modern miracles'.

By the results and the first successes of technique an increasing number of people became conscious of the fact, that technique had engendered two new features: a new man, the engineer, and a new language, the abstract formula. The engineer, the technician, became the objects of admiration; in popular opinion they came to take the place, occupied in earlier periods by the 'virtuoso', the man of brilliant accomplishments. The language of science and technique, the abstract formula, had a different destiny: its inaccessibility prevented its popular appeal, it became the object of emulation in various other, non-scientific disciplines. Dr. Schoenmaekers' *Plastic mathematics* is one of the many impressive examples of this phenomenon. The suggestive power of the abstract formula spread widely among the various circles in intellectual Europe and the magical qualities - which it seemed to have had for those who did not

understand its practical meaning-conquered many of the most progressive minds.

This tendency was strongly felt among the artists of 'De Stijl' and the theories of Dr. Schoenmaekers' had certainly prepared their minds. But the inclination towards the proceedings of technique and towards its language, were indeed most strongly felt among those, who had an adequate knowledge of science and technique: the architects. 'The need for number and measure, for purity and order, for regularity and repetition, for perfection and completion - qualities of the organs of modern life, of technique, of traffic, of hygiene, inherent to social structure, to the economic conditions, to the methods of mass production - finds its forerunner in Cubism.'[129] It is Oud, who thus expounds the affinity between technique and early 20th century painting. And it is known well enough, that Oud did not express an opinion of his own, but that Cubism - as Futurism - has indeed been inspired by technique, precisely by the aspects quoted by Oud: precision, regularity, purity, etc.

Oud tries to trace the meaning of this inspiration: 'Technique has arrived at a new plastic expression (gestaltung) because it applied itself without any afterthought to the practical needs of life. From this fact we must not attempt to derive an equalisation of architecture and technique (.....). But if there have been any traces of an elementary desire for form, belonging to our time, and being of a collective, and therefore of a new structure, they are to be found in technique. Indeed, technique should not serve as an example to architecture, but it could be a lesson and a stimulus.'[130]. And some years later, Van Eesteren, another of 'De Stijl' architects, follows the same line of reasoning: 'The artists saw that our period was shapeless, that is to say that it did not find a synthesis for thought and work. But they felt the first traces of such a synthesis in the products of technique, which all rose from an identical way of thinking: technical thought. The engineer and the modern artist had already much in common before they came to know each other. The artists began to consider matter in a different way: they began, in their, compositions of materials to denaturalize matter. The engineer did the same in his constructions.'[131]

Technical thought, as quoted by Oud and Van Eesteren, was considered to be the dominating trend of thought in the 20th century, as for instance, theological thought had been dominant in the 17th. And it seemed only logical and inescapable, that the century's style should be moulded by the period's predominating trend of thought. 'In this striving for the removal of all anorganic means, and for an exclusive execution in strictly organic means, in this effort, therefore, from irrelevance to objectivity, the material and spiritual, the practical and aesthetic tendencies of our period may be found. Their average force, which becomes more and more evident as being the result of collective currents, is therefore the line of conduct towards a new style.'[132] Oud, who has thus expressed his views on the future of art in general, applies this conviction to his personal discipline: 'The substitution of handicraft by machinework - a social and economic necessity - begins to assume larger proportions in the building trade. Though at first obstinately kept out of the way by the aesthetes,

the application of the mechanical product is spreading more and more, in spite of all opposition, from the subordinate auxiliary material to the most important parts of the building and it makes its influence felt in the formation.'[133]

Abstract, technical thought, being considered on account of the triumph of technique, as the predominating trend in early 20th century civilisation, as its 'average force', was indeed logically to become the indication of the period's style. And as all its partisans have been so intensely fascinated by its results, it is no wonder that they felt its influence in all the reaches of human life. Mondriaan who - under the influence of Schoenmaekers - considers abstract thought chiefly as a striving for balance, for equilibrated relations, is the first to do so: 'Abstract life, still remaining real, manifests itself more and more in all directions. The machine relieves more and more natural forces. In fashions we see a typical tightening of form and an interiorisation of colour, both of which are signs of a withdrawal from nature. In the modern dance (step, boston, tango etc.) we see the same tightening: the round line of the old dances (waltz etc.) has made room for the straight line while every movement is immediately neutralized by a counter-movement - a sign of striving for balance.'[134] As all the domains of human life showed some kind of manifestation of this new, abstract and technical thought, art, which had always been the first to render visible the general trends of a period, could not remain behind. As there was no other predominating force in the period's consciousness - theology and nationalism being considered as obsolete remains of bygone times - technical and scientific abstraction had to lead the way towards the style of the new era. It is of no importance, that a later generation qualified this attitude as a kind of superstition - it happened to be a generally accepted fact at the time.

So intensely were the artists-and not only they-fascinated by the results of technical thought, that they paid little attention to the social consequences of this trend, and that they almost neglected the direct consequences of technique on their own domain. Oud has some concern for the social aspects of the machineage and Van 't Hoff draws conclusions from a situation which he analyses from the social point of view: 'The first claim of the new plastic creation of a style, and more specially in architecture, is to acquire complete knowledge of the present social and economic conditions, both of the materials and of their manufacture. Architecture is not only concerned with the claims of the principal, but with the demands of the workers as well. As to the latter, we should no longer think that building is a compulsory or a forced labour. A building should be logically and purely planned, the project should be based on the possibility of quick and practical execution. Everything should be reasonable and intelligible, so that the manner of working rather shortens than lengthens the day. We demand a maximum of labour from the machine, a minimum from the workman who should not be in the least concerned about the personal feelings of the designer.'[135] This feature of the modern way of production - though barely mentioned in *De Stijl's* writings - is yet of great importance to the development of its conceptions. It accounts, to a great extent, for the anti-individualistic tendencies of the group. As production was, in the 20th century

civilisation no more the affair of the individual, or of a workshop directed by an individual, where the division of labour had split up the process of production into a designing and an executing section, the imprint of the individual and his personal feelings were considered as being out of date. All kinds of features in which the individual feelings of the designer were reflected, could only be realized and were therefore justifiable if the execution was laid in the hands of the same person as the designing. This method being no longer practicable - as the execution was entrusted to an anonymous group of persons-the individual features of design were consequently limited. A truly modern style could only base its reasons of existence on the actual methods of production, such as the division of labour. This principle was not only considered valid for architecture, but for the other plastic arts as well, for a budding style was not to be dependent on the accidental circumstances of a single branch of art, but should depend from the facts generally prevailing in the whole of civilisation. Therefore, the anti-individualistic principles were applied to painting and sculpture as well, stipulating an execution devoid of individualistic features.

It is a remarkable fact, that the artists of 'De Stijl' gave so little attention to the repercussions of technical innovations on painting itself, though this fact can be regarded as one of the important sources of abstract art. Mondriaan, when writing on the technical inventions in the field of music, mentions the fact in a rather casual way: 'As the invention of photography has delivered the death-blow (as André Breton puts it) to the old way of expression, we hail the invention of the "bruitistes" as a new one'[136] Indeed, the invention of photography has been as revolutionary a fact in the domain of the plastic arts and of painting in the first place, as, for instance, the invention of the steam-engine had been in the field of production, or the invention of the airplane in that of transport. An important part of pictorial tradition had thereby been transferred from the realm of art to that of technique: the art of portraiture, the documentary part of painting, was no longer exclusively in the hands of the painter. The removal of this, hitherto so important function of painting, effected, necessarily, the transformation of the remainder. The value of the likeness, of coincidence with the object, became - from one of the important features of painting - a quality which was, at best superfluous, if not unworthy Indeed, photography, would do as well, if not better. There is a typical sentence of Bonset (Van Doesburg) on this subject: 'Portrait painters: solicitors' souls. The drawing up of an accurate likeness of a face by means of colour, has no more artistic value than a notarial act has literary value.'[137] The scale of values had therefore to be re-established and the highest place was allotted to values, not depending on the objects represented, but originating from the artists' creative qualities, such as composition, harmony, balance etc. These values were traced in the works of the old masters (Vantongerloo, *L'Art et son Avenir*, pp. 51, 59, pl. 17 sq.) and stressed in contemporary works. The rise and the growing importance of what Kandinsky has termed 'the spiritual in art' is indeed, to an important degree, a consequence of the invention of photography, which has revolutionised the entire art of painting. Its consequences on a different level -

the creation of an aesthetic theory - have to be examined elsewhere in this study.

The dialectic influence of the invention of photography on plastic art can only be examined here, in as far as it has bearing on the evolution of 'De Stijl', although it is, generally speaking, one of the primary reasons for the growth of abstract art. But there is still another document of 'De Stijl' dealing with photography from a different point of view: 'The enormous enlargement by way of the lens, in projection, betrays every weakness of the human hand; but as it is no more the hand but the spirit, that produces art and as the new spirit demands the greatest possible precision for its expression, it is only the machine in its utter perfection, the modern machinery, that is able to realize the highest claims of creative spirit.'[138] There is a document - among Van Doesburg's writings - which not only connects photography with the rise of abstract art, but with the more specific claims of 'De Stijl': precision, mechanical accuracy. What is here called the 'weakness of the hand' is practically the same as what 'De Stijl' artist elsewhere calls the 'caprice of nature', to which they oppose the constant and imperturbable precision of straight lines and right angles. In their rectilinear and rectangular system they have indeed reached a precision, an accuracy, which can compete with that of a machine - though it may bejust that very lack of precision, that 'weakness of the hand', and the individual features, which characterize some of their works as the masterpieces they happen to be. But as to their aim, it was mechanical precision that was their concern and they claimed it as a necessary means of expression as it agreed with the mathematical accuracy which they considered one of the essential characteristics of their time.

Until now, we have considered the direct consequences of technique on the 'common consciousness of time'; we have seen, that it accounted to some extent for the substitution of natural facts in art by an abstract formula. We have seen that the creation of an abstract language in art is, to a great extent due to the fact that technique has been considered the dominant trend in modern civilization, and that its working method had been a model to the other branches of cultural activity. We have seen that technique has had a direct bearing on the development of the arts by the invention of photography. All these features - which are characteristic of the early 20th century - account for various aspects of the programme and the realisations of 'De Stijl', they actually explain to some degree the abolition of subject matter and the constitution of an objective means of expression.

But there is still another feature in 'De Stijl's' programme, which is stressed on various occasions: the anti-individualistic tendency of 'De Stijl'. Another aspect of the period, of early 20th century civilization, has to be considered in order to account for this phenomenon; the development and growth of collective institutions. It is Oud again, - who, as an architect moves in the centre of social activity - who is most clearly aware of these facts: 'Great art has a causal connection with the social ambitions of the age. The desire for subordinating the individual to the common lot is reflected in daily life, as in art, in the urge to organize individual elements into groups, unions, leagues, socie-

ties, trusts, monopolies, etc. This reconciliation of spiritual and social striving, a necessity for achieving culture, forms the foundation for style.'[139] The subordination of the individual to the common cause therefore, becomes one of the bases of 'De Stijl's' art and its programme. Mondriaan, who was equally aware of these facts, gives them a more idealistic interpretation, when writing on the manifestations of abstract life: 'A striving towards collectivism manifesting itself strongly in social life: autocracy, imperialism with its (natural) law of the strongest, is about to collapse - if it has not done so already - giving way to the spiritual powers of law.'[140] And from this and similar facts, he draws the conclusion, in another article: 'So art, as a form of egotism has already been demolished gradually.'[141] In their striving to give a visual shape to all the tendencies of their period, the artists of 'De Stijl' had to take into account all the various aspects of their time: the social aspect, - the growth of collective institutions - was not the least important. Their ambition to give adequate expression to the anti-individualistic tendencies of their period found its realization once again in the abstract and the exact means of expression which they had started to use. The rectangular opposition of straight lines left no room for individualistic emotions and their coagulation in painting. Abstraction, as it has been brought forward by the 20th century's evolution, was at the same time exact and anti-individualistic. It held the possibility of developing into a collective language which - in its turn - could be handled in a personal, but not in an individualistic manner by the individual artist. This language would indeed be the 'language of our time', the adequate expression of the common consciousness of our time. Van Doesburg has summarized the relations of 'De Stijl's' ambitions with the dominating features of the early 20th century, when he wrote: 'This new consciousness of the time is made up of the need for equivalent relations between the extreme interior, (the spiritual) and the extreme exterior, (the natural). In other words, equivalent relations between the common good and the individual. Furthermore, in the striving for more accuracy in this balance, in life as well as in art and culture. The old consciousness of time however, may be formulated thus: unequilibrated relations between the extreme interior and the extreme exterior, unbalanced relations between the common lot and the individual. The new consciousness of time manifests itself in the expression of the first-mentioned characteristics. The old consciousness of time manifests itself in every expression of the latten Wherever the individual - the natural - is dominating, caprice appears in art as well as in life and culture.'[142]

Technical and scientific though as well as the growth of collective institutions have led to the constitution of an abstract language in practical life. This language is a logical result and a true expression of the intellectual and social state of affairs in the beginning of the 20th century. This abstract way of expression, with its accuracy and its collective intelligibility has in its turn made man susceptible to the acquiring of an abstract language in another branch of cultural activity. In the domain of the arts, this abstract language imposed itself on architecture, for modern architecture is also a branch of modern tech-

nique. Oud, who is well aware of the technical conditions of architecture, sums up the facts: ‘Indeed, its (the modern building's) entire origin and that of all modern constructions, differs from the origin of building in earlier times. The architect of the present day is no longer constantly present on the site of the building operations; but he comes there for inspections while he directs the activities from his offices. There he establishes the forms and the proportions, which are then executed by others.’[143] This repartition of labour, thus imposes an abstract language which makes its influence felt on architecture.

Van 't Hoff emphasizes this fact, when writing on the importance of the ground plan as an abstract way of expression in architecture: ‘Practically, these horizontal sections on which the height is indicated in centimetres, already constitute the whole project in three dimensions.’[144] A building is already existent in the ground plan, as a musical composition in the score: according to the idealistic approach of ‘De Stijl’ and to the desirability of an abstract language, the proportions established on paper entirely realize the form of the work of art. No connection with the outer world of appearances is necessary any longer.

Mondriaan, who was the most ardent partisan of an abstract way of expression, defends it against the accusation of unemotionalism, as well as the incapability to raise emotions. ‘An abstract way of representation is well capable of raising emotions and I remember an example: Some time ago, at the very beginning of the war, a moving picture was shown, representing a large part of the world in a map. On that map suddenly appeared the armies, which began the invasion from Germany, represented by little blocks. Simultaneously, the Allied armies appeared too, also as little blocks and offered resistance. Thus the whole of the dreadful events then happening in the world were represented - in their actual grandeur, not by parts or in detail, as a natural way of representation would have shown it to us.’[145] No matter that this example of abstract language quoted by Mondriaan, shows an abstract language that is partly symbolic, ‘De Stijl's’ abstract language had its part in symbolism as well. What has to be remembered is the fact that all aspects of modern life - technicalities, the growth of collective institutions, the repartition of labour, the impossibility of grasping all various events, - imposed an abstract language on the various branches of human activity. It was considered impossible and unacceptable that art should not express the same tendencies, that it should not employ a similar means of expression.

There is one manifestation of this abstract way of thought: one of the achievements of the early 20th century, that inspired the artists of ‘De Stijl’ more than anything else: the metropolis. Its fascination lasted long after ‘De Stijil's’ disappearance, the last works Mondriaan painted are still inspired by the atmosphere of the metropolis and their titles reveal this inspiration quite definitely. Well-known among them are these three: ‘Trafalgar Square’, (1939-1943, Coll. Mr. H. Holtzman) ‘New York City’, (1942, coll. Mr. H. Holtzman), ‘Broadway Boogie-woogie’ 1942-1943, (coll. Mr. H. Holtzman), etc. But as early as 1919, Mondriaan had written the following: ‘The truly modern artist regards the metropolis as an embodiment of abstract life; it is closer to him than nature,

it will give him an emotion of beauty. For in the metropolis, nature has already been straightened out and regulated by the human spirit. The proportions and the rhythm of planes and lines, will mean more to him that the capriciousness of nature. In the metropolis, beauty expresses itself more mathematically; therefore it is the place, from where the future mathematically artistic temperament must develop, the place whence the new style must come forth.'[146] The metropolis therefore, is 'De Stijl's' most important source of inspiration; it would be an error to go further and to think the metropolis the subject matter for 'De Stijl'. In spite of Mondriaan's titles, his paintings are only based on the inspiration of the subject - they do not depict it. The metropolis therefore, is a pattern or a motive in the original sense of the word; an exterior phenomenon that sets the painter's activity to work.

It is Mondriaan above all others, who emphasizes the importance of the metropolis, as a clear and convincing manifestation of the new era: 'The superficial abstract life of to-day has its exterior manifestations. These are a suitable basis for the development of abstract-real life on one hand, on the other they stand in the way of a pure exteriorization of this life. Social life, cultural life, find their most complete manifestation in the metropolis. Thus the abstract-real art of painting has developed under the influence of the fully modern cultural life of the metropolis; it is plain logic that immature natural life could not have brought forth this art.'[147] These lines are not only an autobiographical remark, an allusion to Mondriaan's long sojourn in Paris, they do indeed hint at the intrinsic connection of 'De Stijl's' art with the metropolis, as a characteristic phenomenon (and a typical expression) of early 20th century life. When Mondriaan comes to New York in 1940, this gigantic and most complete example of a metropolis made such an impression on him, that his manner of painting was entirely rejuvenated and changed.

The metropolis had been created by man, by means of his technical capacities. It is one of the very few aspects of man's surroundings, that bears almost exclusively, the marks of human creation; from this fact results the great attraction it had for the artists of 'De Stijl'. On the other hand, the metropolis has been considered - as we will see later - as one of the main tasks of 'De Stijl'. Town planning had been developed from 'De Stijl' by the discovery that the abstract principles it professed had the possibility of remoulding and of improving the structure of the great cities of today. This conclusion, drawn from the ideas of 'De Stijl' has, as we shall see in a later chapter, been chiefly the work of Van Eesteren.

But the first aspect of this problem, the metropolis as the source of inspiration for 'De Stijl' artists, dates back to a still earlier period of 'De Stijl's' activities. It is most closely related to 'De Stijl's' preference for the mathematically abstract expressions of early 20th century life, for the signs of a new era: 'ln reality surrounding us, we see the dominating aspects of the natural vanishing more and more, of necessity. The caprice of rural nature is readily straightened in the metropolis.'[148] Rural nature is therefore considered by 'De Stijl' as a backward stage of human civilization, as the manifestation of an era, when

man was not yet capable of imposing his will on nature. Technique, that is to say, 19th Century technique and its further development in the 20th century, has enabled man to achieve this, and the result of this glorious effort - at the same time its symbol - is the metropolis.

The admiration for the large cities, for the complicated organization of the metropolis, is a characteristic expression of early 20th century mentality, reflected in poems, novels and paintings and even, though less often, in music. It is characteristic for the optimistic belief of the century's first decade, to live in a period that had started to shape the surroundings of man according to his own laws and that would lead to a liberation of all mankind from every natural limitation. In the century's first decade, man had already seen the abolition of several obstacles which natura had seemed to put in his way. The result was an optimistic belief in man's civilising capacities, worded as follows by Mondriaan: 'By way of the New, nature and reality, which until now did not change, have become different. Moreover, a new reality has been made to oppose it. A less natural reality. Visibly and audibly. The mathematical has there been substituted for the picturesque, the song of the birds by the sound of the machine (.....). Man has remodelled nature while nature has recast man, more or less. Man, thus changed, expresses himself in a different form of artistic utterance, that expresses a different vision of nature.'[149] The fascination of technique, the technical might of the early 20th century may be considered as one of the temporal sources of 'De Stijl'.

But we have to remember that 'De Stijl' was not founded until 1917, when the circumstances of time had already undergone some changes. Though the Netherlands were neutral during the first world war, the country could not close its eyes to the events at its frontiers. Van Doesburg starts his retrospective article of 1929 with a description of the conditions of war as they appeared in the Netherlands: 'At a moment, when the whole of the world almost was still in the midst of war, about 1916, there existed in all Europe - possibly for this reason - an atmosphere that was the condition for a collective and heroic act - of creation. We all lived in the spirit of a genesis. Though there was no war in our neutral Netherlands, yet the war outside caused commotion and a spiritual tension; the soil was nowhere as propitious for the gathering of renewing forces. The war, raging at our borders, drove home many artists who had been working abroad.'[150] The altered conditions could certainly not have been without influence: Van Doesburg had to abandon his artistic activities during the two years of his mobilization, Mondriaan had come to Holland for a short family visit and was compelled to stay there for the duration of the war, Van 't Hoff had come back from America. But the influence of the war on the personal lives of 'De Stijl' artists is of less importance than its consequences on the period's mentality and the repercussions in all the domains of cultural life. As 'The Stijl' was founded in these very years, these consequences will have to be examined.

The first and most important consequence of the world war was, that it broke all optimism and did away with all security. Early 20th century optimism had come to an end after a few weeks of the war; people came to feel that technical knowl-

edge was adaptable to other aims besides the furthering of human happiness. Technique had turned indeed, in a very short time, from an object of admiration into a cause for fear. The aeroplane, the wireless, the zeppelins, only a short while ago wonders of human ingenuousness and civilization, had become horrors and 'inventions of the devil'. Technical knowledge was no longer united with progress, but with destruction.

This was the first blow to early 20th century optimistic mentality. The other blow was concerned with the organization of society. The majority of Europeans in the early 20th century has believed in the social organizations under which they were living; they were to bring progress and human happiness. The outbreak of the first world war proved this confidence a fallacy and the social organizations failures. All the social organizations, unions, leagues, societies, trusts etc., were unable to prevent war and destruction: they sometimes even helped to further it. The Europe that used to be before the war, that is, for the leisured classes at least - one country only, was split up into two halves which fought each other. The illusion of one European country, of one European civilization vanished almost overnight. And with it, many other illusions disappeared: that of progress based on the insight of government, that of a march of mankind towards true happiness, by the exclusive means of technical evolution, that of peace treaties and their power to prevent wars and many others. Ideas, which had been considered as definite for more than a generation, which had been the base of the education of children and a pattern for the conduct of adults, did not outlive the first few months of the war. A generation had not only lost its illusions, it had above all lost its basic feeling of security, a feeling that had been part of its psychological structure.

Though the Netherlands were not at war, the events at its frontiers did make themselves felt. Without relative suffering, the country was nevertheless confronted with all the tragedies in the neighbouring states; it was chiefly affected by the agony and distress in the neighbouring Belgium. The violation of the Belgian neutrality was, in spite of the thankfulness that the Netherlands had escaped, a great psychological shock for the latter country. It had lived in the euphoric optimism of the The Hague peace conferences, which it had witnessed with such enthusiasm. The illusion of an everlasting peace, protected by a small and peaceful nation, had fallen apart as well. Moreover, social contrast aggravated during the course of the war, when trade and industry could accumulate fortunes by the fact that the Netherlands were neutral, while the working classes came to suffer more and more from the food shortage, the cold, as well as the fact that many of the wage earners had to give up their jobs to go into military service.

The psychological consequences of these facts were an increasing uncertainty, now and then, even anxiety. The Dutch nation, in all its social layers which, on the whole, had been brought up without fearing the future, began to feel doubts. More and more people lost confidence in the structure of the national and international organizations - a feeling of distrust was growing, culninating ultimately in the attempt at a revolution in the critical months of 1918. But this

was only the reaction of an active and combative minority. The greater part of the Dutch nation sought a refuge elsewhere. The confidence in the traditional values had vanished, and for ever. But, as a result of the country's neutrality and by the inestimable humanitarian effort of the entire population, there was still some confidence left, although it was a confidence of a different order.

What was left of Dutch optimism and confidence was split up between two fields of human activity: one side it manifested itself in deeds of charity towards the Belgian refugees, the Red Cross, etc., and in the realization of huge projects in home affaire. On the other hand, in thought and spiritual activity, it reverted to utopianism. Starting from the very fact that a realization of all the glorious hopes had been proved impossible in an immediate future, or at least within a measurable space of time, people tended to project their hopes into the indefinite future. Being aware of the fact that the present state1 of affairs was everything but satisfactory and without reasons to suppose or effect a speedy change, they concentrated all that was left of optimism, of confidence and of hope, on a future beyond definition or expectation. As they were convinced of the fact that the Netherlands could no longer change the general course of events, they felt excused from any direct obligation towards political or social activity - with the exception of what one could do individually in order to relieve the sufferings of the individual fellow-man. The public activity in the Netherlands withdrew from the task of social and political reconstruction in Europe and concentrated on utopian speculations and on art, science and literature.

There is documentary evidence of this trend of thought in the writings of ‘De Stijl’ by Van 't Hoff, who had returned for some time from abroad and who therefore, was confronted by Dutch reality in a very acute way: ‘The present system from which we suffer, but to which we cling so desperately, is coming to pieces from its own rottenness, followed by general destruction so that in the end a real, abundant unity, a constructive era, a style may manifest itself.’[151] This utopian attitude is a characteristic feature of the Dutch mentality during. the war and it can be found again in the ideas and the writings of ‘De Stijl’ as we will disclose in a subsequent chapter.

A world of security had been destroyed by the war. But in the Netherlands, - a neutral island with a belligerent sea all around it, there was still a possibility of searching for new values, a new sense of security. This search however, had to start in the opposite direction than that of the past. The disillusions, the feeling of having been betrayed by the old social order, by its standards and manifestations, was too strong to permit a research into the fields already cultivated in the past. The spirit of opposition, was clear-cut and firm; again a gap was opened between the past and the future. ‘De Stijl’ manifesto of 1918, which speaks of an ‘old consciousness of time’, as well as a new one, putting the two in juxtaposition, is an obvious expression of this mentality.

The pre-war period, in the Netherlands as well as elsewhere in Europe, had been characterized by a highly developed culture of the individual, by acivilization that had reached its peak by means of exceptional achievements by

gifted individuals. In art, in statesmanship as well as in science the influence of these men of genius made itself felt and their activities left a deep imprint on these domains. Art was considered as being ‘the individual expression of the most individual feeling’ but other branches had also become the field of expression for the individual. In politics, for instance, Dr. Abraham Kuyper, the exceptionally gifted Calvinist statesman, has set his seal on the era more firmly than the power of his party had done; in social matters, Domela Nieuwenhuis and Henriette Roland Holst are outstanding examples. In art, the different schools of painting had concentrated more around various personalities: Breitner, to his time, was the development of impressionism, Toorop was symbolism, etc.

These leading individuals were held responsible by the next generation for the failure of the pre-war period. But not only were they criticized and reviled - the principle of individual realization was attacked even more strongly. The spirit of opposition against the past merged with all these tendencies in social and economic life, that had already stimulated the creation of collective bodies and which we have dealt with on a previous page. The result was a need, a demand for the institution of collective organizations and for their expression, caused by the social and economic circumstances on the one hand and by the failure of the systems of the past on the other.

‘De Stijl's’ programme of collective striving towards a collective style, expressing collective thought, is perhaps the clearest manifestation of this trend. Still, ‘De Stijl's’ programme showed the other aspect of the period's attitude as well: for, in demanding a collective style, it remained somewhat utopian owing to the fact that it did not start out from the concrete principle of an existing collective, but from speculative and axiomatic indications. Its programme was conditioned to a certain extent by opposition to a past which it considered sterile and incoherent, which had proved a failure, as well as by a hope for the realization of its dreams in a utopian future. Both trends are equally characteristic of their time in the Netherlands during the war and it took ‘De Stijl’ several years to free itself from the influence of a period which had been so closely linked with its own beginnings.

The various trends of the period, summed up in this chapter have all had their bearing on ‘De Stijl's’ origin, not only on its theories, but on the work of the different artists as well. The spirit of opposition expressed itself in their work as a definite rejection of the naturalist and sensitive art of the past it is one of the conditions of the obstinate search for an abstract, precise and unsentimental means of expression. A utopian attitude towards life thus made it possible for ‘De Stijl’ artists to care so little about the fact that practically nobody appreciated their art: a distant future would bring with it understanding as well as appreciation. Technique as well, played its part in the rise of ‘De Stijl’: the working methods of the modern scientist and technician, the development of an abstract language, a formula, inspired ‘De Stijl’ artists to emulation. And the direct consequences of the modern re-division of labour, its impersonal approach and its demand for a precise and equally abstract means of spiritual communication, may have been one of the decisive factors.

But these features could be observed all over Europe within the same period, with the exception only of the Dutch political situation during the years from 1914 to 1918. Various trends of abstract art have sprung up from these and from similar conditions in the years from 1911 onwards. But 'De Stijl' is a distinct phenomenon, differing from all other trends of abstract art by essential and obvious features. Though 'De Stijl' has always been intentionally and consciously, an international movement, we can only account for its special characteristics, at least to some degree, by examining the conditions and the heritage of its native Netherlands.

The origin of 'De Stijl': the local conditions

'De Stijl' has found its origin exclusively in the Netherlands. This fact has unintentionally and unconsciously influenced its work very deeply, as weil as its way of expression and its programme. In order to become well acquainted with this connection, we shall have to examine the Netherlands in their relation to 'De Stijl', from two diiferent angles. In the first place we are concerned with the Netherlands as a geographical whole; as the visible surroundings of 'De Stijl' artists, which had some bearing if not on their work, at any rate on their vision: on the education and conditioning of their eyes. In the second place we shall have to examine the Netherlands as a historic entity, that is to say, we shall have to deal with the various traditions, characteristics and more or less typical features, which owe their development to history and which Huizinga with great mastery has summed up as 'Nederlands geestesmerk' (the characteristics of the Dutch spirit). Both this and the other series of conditions have been of considerable influence on 'De Stijl'; they moulded 'De Stijl's' character, they have contributed to the fact that 'De Stijl' never slopped over into non-descript liaisons with cubism or monumental art but that it has indeed developed its character in a manner markedly its own, so that it could eventually turn out to be, what we would like to call the Dutch contribution to 20th century art.

The influence of a country, of a given landscape may be subject to wellfounded doubt in the case of a trend of abstract art as in the case of 'De Stijl'. But by this influence we do not refer to a direct relation between a definite fact in nature and a single, given work of art. There is though, a relation between the Dutch landscape as a whole and the work of 'DeStijl', also seen as a whole.

Even in the case of an abstract trend in art, we are entitled to assume and analyse the relation between nature and the mode of expression. There exists an article by Van Doesburg which is explicit documentation of our liberty to do so: 'Though it may be accepted as certain that in future the artist no longer needs a definite objective subject for the single work of art, it must all the same be stressed that, indirectly, the experience of reality must ever be the foundation of all works of art'[152] Abstract art therefore, does not exclude the effect of all the influences which the artist submits to in the contact with his native surroundings, the country of his birth for instance, on the work of art.

It may seem difficult to prove this relation. Any attempt towards a naturalistic interpretation of 'De Stijl' creations must be firmly rejected as being in direct opposition to the movement's aims and programme. Yet there are certain indications of this subtly indirect influence, which may enable us to find an explanation of 'De Stijl's' singular character among the parallel artistic movements of its time. An indication of a rather general nature may be found in Van Doesburg's retrospective article of 1929, where he writes on the repercussions of 'De Stijl' at the Weimar Bauhaus: 'The work of "De Stijl" originating from the peaceful lowlands of the Dutch landscape, could therefore not be anything but alien to them. Nevertheless, the renovating spirit of "De Stijl" had already passed the threshold of the Weimar Bauhaus.'[153] Van Doesburg does not only give a general indication of a relationship here, but he even shows the corresponding facts: the peaceful Dutch lowlands are brought into connection with the works of 'De Stijl'. The Dutch landscape could never be considered as 'De Stijl's' subject matter, but it could quite well be one of the indirect sources of inspiration. But we will have to find more indications as proof of this assumed connection.

They may be found in the 'scenic indications', cited by Mondriaan in the various parts of a trialogue published in *De Stijl*. We are going to quote these indications in order to set the scene, which then has to serve Mondriaan's purpose in explaining the essence of neoplasticism. Three of them give a sufficiently clear example of Mondriaan's aims: 'A mill seen from a close proximity - in sharp and clear contrast against a nocturnal sky - the sails at rest, in the form of a cross'; and another: 'A garden with straight-cut trees and bushes - house.' In the trialogue these are discussed as follows: 'then, according to your opinion, this garden is closer to pure sculpture than many statues are', and finally: 'The front of a church, as a flat plane against the dark, in the brightness of the city lights.'[154] These scenes might eventually be found anywhere else, though they are perhaps more familiar in the Netherlands. But with the introduction of the first scene in the trialogue, we read the following description; Late evening - flat country - wide horizon - and high above this, the moon)[155] and in the course of the dialogue we find the following sentences: 'In this landscape the horizontal - with regard to ourselves - only manifests itself definitely in the horizontal line of the horizon. One position is thus definitely manifested; yet its contrast with the vertical or any other position, is not manifested exactly in this landscape by a line' and further in the dialogue: 'The restfulness in this landscape is so great, as the horizontal and the vertical are plastically manifested in it and the relationship of position appears in natural harmony, though not purely equilibrated.'[156] If we add to these lines a few others, from a late, retrospective article by Mondriaan, we will find ourselves closer to the objects of our investigation. 'Observing sea, sky and stars, I sought to indicate their plastic function through a multiplicity of crossing verticals and horizontals. Impressed by the vastness of nature, I was trying to express its expansion, rest and unity.'[157]

When summing up the common factors in Mondriaan's and Van Doesburg's

statements and descriptions, we arrive at a picture of nature that has inspired ‘De Stijl’ artists and which is indeed, most characteristically Dutch: flat, restful expanses of land or water, bound by a linear and sharply defined horizon, above which the undisturbed surfaces of the sky or the uniform multitude of the stars are showing. A landscape that is almost without parallel in Europe, for nowhere else in Europe the horizon shows up so distinctly as a non-imaginary, but existing horizontal line. Nowhere else in Europe indeed; the landscape was characterized by the almost endless extension of flat planes, articulated only by a few vertical accents such as trees or church steeples. No other country in Europe either, could give the observing eye that impression of infinite restfulness, of natural balance, than the Dutch landscape could. This aspect of Dutch scenery however, was as yet to be re-discovered, former generations of painters in the 19th century had been on the look-out for other aspects: for rural, idyllic charm, which they preferred to what they considered as a monotonous uniformity of the great plains. We have to go back as far as the 17th century, to painters like Philips de Coninck, to Hercules Seghers, in order to find any appreciation of this vast, infinite and restful aspect of the Dutch landscape. It had been overshadowed ia Dutch painting, by a trend of romanticism which had already been started with Ruisdael.

By means of the above quotations, the assumption becomes acceptable that the general character of the Dutch landscape - not its incidental aspects, - must have inspired the painters of ‘De Stijl’. But there may have been an additional attraction for ‘De Stijl’ artists in another aspect of the Dutch landscape. We have seen how very much the artists of ‘De Stijl’ admired the metropolis, as it was opposed to the capricious and arbitrary forms of nature by means of a system of selected and regular elements, created by man. We have seen that for the artists of ‘De Stijl’, the metropolis was the true expression of the ‘new consciousness of time’, of a conception of life which emphasized the domination of man over nature. The features which the founders of ‘De Stijl’ admired in the metropolis, may be recognized, although on another plane, in the Dutch landscape.

Indeed the Dutch countryside is the least natural of all European landscapes. The elements, termed by ‘De Stijl’ as nature's capriciousness, have, to a great extent been eliminated for centuries: the Dutch landscape has not been built by nature, but, for the larger part by man. Following the - abstract - laws of nature and the precepts of economy, the Dutch engineers and dyke-builders had already imparted a rigidly mathematical character to their countryside, They had, in common with the town planners of the modern metropolis, straightened the curves of the incidental streams and rivers into rectilinear canals, they had connected the cities by straight roads, often running parallel with the canals and, in the 19th century, the railroads had added another mathematical element to this accomplished construction. The pattern of the Dutch landscape did indeed correspond to a great extent and in its essential features to the admirmg description which Mondriaan had given to the metropolis.

The fact therefore, that their native surroundings coincided in a remarkable

way with their imagined aim, must not be neglected in this context. We do not wish to assert by any means that the painters of 'De Stijl' have ever 'copied' the pattern of the Dutch landscape. Within reason, however, we may be sure that the fact of their having been born and subsequently lived in such a landscape, developed in them a certain pre-disposition for the rectilinear and the rectangular, that it influenced their way of looking at things, an influence and a prejudice which cannot be explained and was not found in any other European country.

A sentence from an article by Mondriaan, dealing with the relations between the outer world and the abstract painter's work may be quoted in this connection: 'On the contrary, all that the non-figurative artist receives from the outside is not only useful, but indispensable, because it arouses in him the desire to create that, which he only vaguely feels and which he could never represent in a true manner without the contact with visible reality and with the life which surrounds him. It is precisely from this visible reality that he draws the objectivity which he needs in opposition to his personal subjectivity. It is precisely from this visible reality that he draws the means of expression and, as regards the surrounding life, it is precisely this which has made lus art non-figurative.'[158] We know how very much Mondriaan was influenced in his later years by 'visible reality' and by his 'environment', when the impression made on him by New York changed his mature style and brought about a new development. Is it a too far-reaching conclusion to decide from the facts and the documents, that a similar influence was at work in the years from 1914-1917, this time originating from the Dutch landscape? And is it not going too far also, to assume that this influence on Mondriaan and his fellows of 'De Stijl' contributed one of the factors that helped to bring into existence in 1917 the hitherto new tendency in abstract art which we now know as 'De Stijl'?

The possibility of the influence of the Dutch landscape on the origin of 'De Stijl' has been brought forward, in order to account, together with other factors - such as the development of cubism, the philosophy of Dr. Schoenmaekers - for the peculiar appearance of 'De Stijl' in comparison to other and contemporary trends of abstract art. The rectilinear and rectangular structure of its work and the theoretical essays founded these essential principles of 'De Stijl' on a basis of consistent argumentation. As long as these facts have not been accounted for by any other facts or series of events, the suggestions proposed here may remain part of our working hypothesis.

Besides, the facts and documents quoted before do not hint at a mere visual coincidence; they have another, though more intricate meaning. And they are, as far as they concern the Dutch landscape, not only connected with the visual appearance of the Dutch countryside, but with the history of the country and its psychological repercussions as well. The characteristics of the Dutch landscape have been described here as a mathematical rigidity, a rectilinear and frequently even rectangular pattern. As a reason for this exceptional feature for Europe it has been mentioned that Dutch landscape was created to a large extent not by nature but by man. This fact has obviously influenced not only

the landscape, but also man, by whom it was constructed; i.e. the need for the construction and the maintenance of the Dutch dykes and polders has, in its turn, created a mentality, that can be considered the remote forerunner of 20th century technical thought. Among the intellectual conditions, which are necessary for the upkeep of a complicated system of irrigation and navigability, the gifts of precision, exact calculation and mathematical discipline are essential. The care and vigilant concern for the country's dykes and waterways had been a question of primary importance to the entire population, so that the qualifies needed for the performance of these duties were highly valued among the social standards. Precision, accuracy, calculation: these qualifies of abstract thought had become important social values long before trade and industry had added to them a new and slightly less respectable price. Neatness and precision had thus become, by a locally conditioned development, part of the intellectual heritage of the Dutch people. These are the same qualities, which were so much emphasized and so highly appreciated by the artists of 'De Stijl'. They are virtues belonging to a social structure, which is chiefly based on the necessity of man's domination of nature. This is indeed the case in the Netherlands, perhaps more than in any European country; the conditions of the country make such a domination necessary, and the same qualities of the mind have proved, in their turn, an important asset in another field of Dutch activity: navigation.

In his article on the principles of a new creative art and in its German translation in the Bauhausbuch, Van Doesburg writes: 'It depends on a people's attitude towards life: if it is predominantly superficial (natural) or more profound (spiritual)'[159]. A people's attitude towards life is, in its turn, conditioned by the structure of its social organisation, the bases of which can go back in history as far as the middle ages, but that still influence the present day's attitude towards life. A few lines further in his article, Van Doesburg quotes Egyptian art as an example of the expression of a spiritual attitude of a people: 'We see an art that expresses ideas which predominated with the Egyptians'. The abstract, the mathematical qualities of Egyptian art have always appealed to the artists of 'De Stijl', and to Van Doesburg above all; he used to oppose Egyptian art to the more 'naturalistic' expression of the Greeks, who had achieved harmony by natural, bodily means. We only propound this quotation, to indicate a parallelism in this respect with Dutch tradition - being perfectly aware, though, that the tradition of mathematical accuracy is only one side (and a greatly neglected one) of Dutch cultural heredity; both Egypt and the Netherlands were countries, the prosperity of which depended for a great deal on human domination over nature, and which therefore have developed the same scientific and engineering qualities that have sometimes found their way into art.

It may be true, that the traces of this mathematical and engineering mentality are not always easily found in Dutch art, though there exist a few striking examples, which have to be cited afterwards. But there is, quite definitely, another feature in Dutch cultural tradition, which becomes obvious in its art and which springs from the same sources. This quality, widespread in the

Netherlands and not only among artists, is perfection, an aversion to irnprovising. It is, after all, nothing but a variation of the desire for precision; the will to make everything tally with the pre-established calculations. Not many Dutch artists have gone as far in their quest for perfection as the artists of 'De Stijl'. One of their most important aims was to exclude from their efforts everything that could be attributed to casual or incidental causes, among which they were prepared to count their own individuality. This utter perfectionism, which is indeed a well-founded Dutch quality, could be realized most properly by abstract means of expression, by elements that were constant and objective, such as the numbers in a mathematical formula. Rectilinear and rectangular composition offered the possibility of such perfection, and it was adopted by the artists of 'De Stijl' as such.

At the beginning of his article on Mondriaan, on the occasion of his New York memorial exhibition, Mr. J.J. Sweeney writes as follows: 'What a retrospective view of forty years of Piet Mondriaan's paintings brings home most forcefully to us is not the ardent self-restraint and single-mindedness of his work - these are already commonplace - but the intimacy with which his roots are bound up in the most firmly established traditions of his native Netherlands...'[160] Though Mr. Sweeney aims chiefly at the linking of artistic tradition, we might be permitted to give his words a broader meaning and to stress once more the fact that Mondriaan and his fellow-artists of 'De Stijl' were deeply rooted not only in Dutch artistic tradition, but in Dutch tradition in general. Precision is a traditional Dutch virtue, so is neatness and cleanliness. The art of 'De Stijl' has often been decried as 'aseptie', 'clinically hygienic' or 'sterilc'. The features, aimed at by these denigrating descriptions, are nothing but the manifestation of a complete spiritual cleanliness. And cleanliness is indeed an almost proverbial Dutch virtue - so deeply rooted indeed in Dutch cultural heritage, that there is but one word (schoon) to define both the notion of 'clean' and 'beautiful'. The beauty of 'De Stijl's' paintings and architecture is indeed contained in the very fact of their cleanliness. The artists of 'De Stijl' have, by their work, given a new significance to a characteristic ambiguity in the Dutch language, and they have manifested, by the same fact, their firm allegiance to Dutch tradition. Their work has therefore to be considered as being profoundly rooted in Dutch tradition and, on the other hand, Dutch tradition and 'the characteristics of Dutch spirit' may help us to explain the origin of 'De Stijl' and its particular appearance. Dutch tradition though, is a very intricate problem owing to the various and superseding layers of history, which have conditioned its different aspects. One other aspect, yet, is present beyond doubt, having had, besides, an important influence on art in the 17th century: Calvinism and the theological tradition of the Dutch people. It is the more important when we remember that both Mondriaan and Van der Leck were brought up in a rigidly orthodox environment. Mondriaan's father had been the head-master of a protestant school at Amersfoort and besides, an ardent follower of the Calvinist statesman Dr. A. Kuyper, who had personally befriended him. Van der Leck readily admitted that he had been a regular church-

goer and devoted Calvinist from his youth until the early years of the new century. The knowledge of these facts gives a new significance to a series of quotations from 'De Stijl', and it may enable us to gain a new insight into the origin and the character of 'De Stijl'.

There is a document, among the writings of 'De Stijl' in which Protestantism and its relation to 'De Stijl's' approach to art is explicitly formulated and we shall have to start our investigations with this document. Van Doesburg, in an article on *Thought, Contemplation, Plastic expression* writes the following lines: 'It is wrong to identify the essence of thought with contemplation, just as it is wrong with regard to contemplation to identify it with sensual representation of nature. The latter is a conception of classical and Roman-Catholic origin, against which Protestantism has gone to battle (iconoclasm)'.[161] The iconoclastic tendencies of Protestantism, which manifested themselves in the Netherlands after 1550, are thus proposed by 'De Stijl' as being related with. 'De Stij'ls' own trends. Indeed, at its very beginning, 'De Stijls' had been received - and not favourably - by the Dutch public as a manifestation of iconoclasm; doing away with all subject matter, destroying the familiar likeness of nature, could scarcely be considered anything else. But still, there is some truth at the bottom of this apperception: the intellectual, the theological motives of both these tendencies do indeed run parallel. The main argument of iconoclastic Protestantism - based upon a rigidly universalist doctrine and on a forceful rejection of late mediaeval nominalism - was the conception, that every representation of the divine in the forms of its creation was sacrilege - and therefore anathema. The universalist conviction of 'De Stijl' and its aversion to every form of nominalistic approach, was scarcely less strong than 16th Century Protestant faith. 'De Stijl's' conviction may have been based on other arguments, correlated by different facts - in its very essence it could still be, however, an offshoot of a trend of thought, deeply rooted in the Dutch mentality.

There is a sentence in another article by Van Doesburg, where he expresses a similar universalist absolutism in regard to art: 'It is a matter of course that art, once having reached that height, can never return to comparative representation or to symbolical images, since, from an aesthetic point of view as well as from a neo-religious one, the profanation of the absolute by the illusion of delusive proportion weakens the truth.'[162] These lines could almost have been written in the 16th Century, by a consistent defendant of iconoclasm.

The original basis of iconoclasm in the 16th Century, is a universalist interpretation of the first commandment: 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them nor serve them; for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God.' The absolute essence of the deity cannot and therefore should not even be attempted to be expressed by the forms of creation. And as the believer concentrates on the deity, he should not let his concentration be diverted by forms and thoughts, which never reach the absoluteness, the completeness of his notion of the deity.

This reasoning is about the same as Van Doesburg's argumentation. Only he substitutes for the name of God the notion of truth - while nevertheless intending exactly the same; the absolute, unimaginable essence, which for all universalist thought is the very starting point of all creative activity, of all form, of nature - in other words of the entire universe. There is actually an explicit document to be found in which this absolutistic universalism and its roots in the Old Testament, become sufficiently clear: 'The image as a symbol of divinity can only mean to the 20th century man: the profanation of the divine or the absolute, whether he imagines this as being absolutely objective, or subjective, or as an interplay of both. Hence it follows, that we ought only to face an image (work of art) with exciusively aesthetic intentions.'[163] Thus there is a definite relation between Calvinist universalism and the ideas of 'De Stijl' - a relation which concentrates around the notion of 'profanation'. The absolute, the divine, is so high a value, that the forms of this world can but veil it and must dim its perceptibility to man. There is, in this way, a relation between 'De Stijl' and the rigidly mosaic tradition of Calvinist faith, stressing the power and the glory of one almighty God and casting anathema on every representation of the absolute by natural, sensual means. There are a few lines by Mondriaan as well - though written in a later period - which express a similar trend of feeling: 'To love things in reality is to love them profoundly; it is to see them as a microcosmos in the macrocosmos. Only in this way one can achieve a universal expression of reality. Precisely on account of this profound love for things, nonfigurative art does not aim at rendering them in their particular appearance. Precisely by its existence non-figurative art shows that "art" continues always along its true road. It shows that "art" is not the expression of the appearance of reality as we see it, nor of the life which we live, but that it is the expression of true reality and true life... indefinable, but realizable in plastics'.[164] The trend of thought is as rigidly absolutist as can be - and we would not be surprised in the least to find a similar utterance in the writings of one of the early Leiden doctors of divinity, or of a universalist scholar at one of the mediaeval universities.

Universalist thought and the rejection of the temporal and limited appearance of reality, usually go together - and they do so in Calvinist tradition - with other trends of an absolutist system: a strong distrust of the senses, a tendency towards speculative reasoning, a strict spiritual discipline. In Calvinist tradition all these trends can be found, not only as accidental, but as essential features; we have to try to demonstrate their existence in the work and in the conceptions of 'De Stijl'. It will not be difficult to show the aversion in the work of 'De Stijl' to all sensual aspects of reality: all curves, all mixed colours. All indefinite relations have been carefully eliminated from 'De Stijl's' plastic work as being part of the fallacious charms of this world. 'De Stijl's' means of expression have been reduced to the straight line, the right angle, and the three primary colours, in their utter intensity - all of them elements which cannot be determined by the senses, but are reduced to their absolute and essential quality by reason, by spiritual and not by sensual means. These elements are not perceptible in

nature - they cannot be found nor be established by the senses. They do not automatically recall, as all other plastic elements would do, a direct sensual association with nature. They are elements of another order - as the numbcrs in mathematics, the diagrams in geometry and the notes in music.

There are some documents among the writings of *De Stijl* that will emphasize this point even more. Huszar, one of the founders of *De Stijl*, writes in the second volume (1919): 'The serious fault committed by many well-reasoning men, is to value the aesthetic, the most disinterested in man less highly than thought (by aesthetic is meant: aim in itself) as - so they reason-the aesthetic becomes visible, has thus been rendered sensually perceptible, by which fact the spiritual loses some of its value. But has thought then, not been rendered sensually perceptible? Is not the word (spoken or written) a materialization of thought?'[165] It is remarkable how the members of 'De Stijl' seem to think it necessary to find a kind of excuse for the fact that their means of expression - though as absolute and elementary as possible, so devoid of sensual features - are not yet quite dematerialized. There is a curious document, pertaining to the same aspect of 'De Stijl's' spiritual attitudes, among the notes of Van Doesburg, which have been published in the memorial number of *De Stijl* 'The need for much matter is the domination of the beast within us, to need little is spiritual. The spirit lives on itself. A work should be meagre, or at least it should give the impression.'[166] And in the same notes: 'We abstract painters work more within our spirit than on canvas. When we start on the canvas, the worst of the work has already been done'[167]. We may consider these sentences documented proof of a marked aversion to sensual charm, to the whole of art's sensual aspect. The painters of 'De Stijl' oppose a spiritual, an intellectual trend to the abominated sensual side of art - as Calvinism had opposed the light of its doctrine to the sensual charm of the arts that had been servants of the faith. A sentence in Dr. Schoenmaeker's work must be understood in this light - and was certainly understood in that way by the painters of 'De Stijl': 'Protestantism which consistently rejects every exterior materialisation and therefore every contemplation as well.'[168] And it may be proposed that these similar trends that we have tried to demonstrate, in Calvinism and in 'De Stij' are not due to an incidental parallelism, but to the fact that Calvinism is part of the spiritual heritage of every Dutchman and makes its influence felt even in spheres which are not closely related to theology, and even on persons who have no longer any ties with the church or with the Protestant community in their practical life.

It may be the same with 'De Stijl's' tendency towards speculative reasoning. All the writings of *De Stijl* bear the marks of that speculative and axiomatic thought, which is also to be found in orthodox Protestant theology. When working through the various volumes of *De Stijl*, the reader will be impressed by the consistency, by the conclusiveness of the arguments brought forward; but he will, as well, always find two or three axioms at the bottom of these argumentations which are unavoidable and which form the bases of all further study. These axioms have to be examined in the next chapter, as they are essential to 'de Stijl's' character and development. But the axiomatic way of thinking

may be investigated here, as it is in some ways related to one of the aspects of Dutch tradition: to the theological way of thinking. It has led, in Dutch history, to a form of sectarianism and to a variety of abstract thought, which is - true to its distant mosaic origin - somewhat related to talmudism. Both these consequences can be demonstrated in the development of 'De Stijl': sectarianism appears when the various members of 'De Stijl' begin to disagree with one another about the interpretation of one of the axiorms, for instance when in 1925 Van Doesburg developed elementarism and Mondriaan stuck to the original version of neoplasticism and consequently left 'De Stijl'. His letter, quoted above on page 27 is a characteristic sign of orthodoxy: a factor in Dutch descent which is greatly evident in all the artists of 'De Stijl', though perhaps most clearly in Mondriaan, whose evolution is indeed a consecutive development, beginning from a once accepted artistic creed and, with unswerving faith, setting up the content of this creed as a rule of conduct.

This orthodoxy, as it may thus be termed, compels a strict, spiritual discipline. There is a very eloquent document among Mondriaan's later writings which shows this aspect of the deep penetration of the artistic creed into the entire life of the artist: 'It is therefore equally wrong to think that the non-figurative artist creates through "the pure intuition of his mechanical process", that he makes "calculated abstractions" and that he wishes to "suppress sentiment not only in himself but also in the spectator" (.....). That which is regarded as a system is nothing but constant obedience to the laws of pure plastics, to necessity which his art demands from him'.[169] This constant obedience to a law, which has not been manifestly revealed but which has to be rediscovered every moment by the conscience, may be considered as an essentially Protestant thought. It is a feature which often recurs in Dutch history, and which is linked up closely with the importance Dutch tradition attaches to the individual conscience. Mondriaan and all the other members of 'De Stijl' offer an example of this human attitude: the differences within 'De Stijl' have always been those of conscience. It is that 'ardent self restraint and single-mindedness'[170] to which Sweeney refers in his study on Mondriaan; it is also the faith, with which Van der Leck develops, from 1919 on, the aspect of 'De Stijl's' principles, to which he considers himself bound. The spiritual discipline of the members of 'De Stijl', their orthodox - or rectilinear - development may be considered as a feature of the 'characteristics of the Dutch spirit' rooted in the Calvinist tradition of the country and in the individual artists.

The work of 'De Stijl' and the theories developed by the artists thus bear the marks of definite Dutch traditions. And even the constitution of the group, the foundation of the review, is in some way connected with these. In the introduction to the first number of the periodical, we come across this characteristic sentence: 'For the propagation of the beautiful, a spiritual group is more necessary than a social one'[171]. This sentence hints at another characteristic in Dutch intellectual life during the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century: the importance of spiritual and theological trends in social and political life and their, prevalence over the social and political trends of the

period. For instance: political parties in the Netherlands, during the period concerned, were set up according to spiritual and theological convictions and they contained all of the various layers of the social structure. There were no political parties uniting the interest of a certain social group; political life was entirely dominated by the spiritual - and then mostly theological - trends. This pattern links the social and political life with the individual conscience; it gives to a group a spiritual programme and with this programme endows it with a certain missionary zeal. In comparison to other European countries, this political conception may seem to act as a check at the close of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, it is, however, nothing more than an echo, a reflection of Dutch theological tradition: the result has been a large number of political parties, divided from one another by a difference in spiritual creed, which to outsiders may appear somewhat chimerical.

We have to consider this background, when we read the sentence quoted from the introduction to the first number of 'De Stijl' and we have to be aware of the lack of consideration for the social element in the community in the early 20th century Netherlands, when attempting to understand the disregard of most of 'De Stijl'-artists for the social features which were, in one way or another, related with their art. The spiritual aspect though, is emphasized more than ever, as we have seen from the sentence quoted above. For the artists of 'De Stijl' the spiritual meant, more than a purification of art from natural and utterly material elements: it had an ethical significance as well as an aesthetical one. Here 'De Stijl's' ambitions materialize in a long chain of moralist treatises, which can be followed all through the history of Dutch philosophy. 'De Stijl' explicitly states the equivalence and the coincidence of beauty and truth, of the good and the beautiful in the words of Mondriaan: 'The good and the beautiful: for aesthtic truths reveal themselves in accordance with ethical truths. Thus they both are expressions of one supreme truth'.[172]

It is 'De Stijl's' primary concern to express and to demonstrate these laws of aesthetics which, at the same time, are the ethical laws, by the elementary means of expression which 'De Stijl' considered as exclusively suitable for their manifestation. When thinking of the far-reaching ethical consequences that Mondriaan attaches to neo-plasticism, may we be permitted to draw a parallel between 'De Stijl' and the great work of another Dutchman: Spinoza? Has it not been the ambition of 'De Stijl' artists to establish, in the utmost consequences of their work, another 'Ethica more geometrico demonstrata'? Is it not the emphasizing of the objectivity of their elementary means and their mathematically inspired composition, that entitled them to claim a universal value for their creations? There may even have been a certain influence of Spinoza on 'De Stijl' artists through Dr. Schoenmaekers, who with regard to his philosophy asserts: 'Plastic mathematics are pantheistic'.[173] Spinoza's *Ethica* is one of the books which are to be found in 'De Stijl' library (*De Stijl* II, p. 72). But it is more probable that 'De Stijl's' works and principles are the manifestation of a way of thinking, of a trend of expression, which belongs to the

Dutch people's spiritual tradition and which had been manifested some 250 years previously by Spinoza.

By the preceding investigations and observations, we have described a series of features, more or less closely related to 'the characteristics of the Dutch spirit' on one side, and to 'De Stijl' on the other. It is difficult indeed to find a common denominator for these features, to express them in words as clearly as they are expressed plastically in the work of 'De Stijl'. There are, in Van Doesburg's notes, published in the memorial number of *De Stijl*, a few lines which give a clear description of the climate of thought we mean to characterize as typically Dutch: 'I abhor all which is temperament, inspiration, sacred fire, and all the attributes of genius that conceal the untidiness of the mind'[174]. This remark emphasizes what has been remarked above, on the Dutch habit of cleanliness. But this notion would not be sufficient for characterizing the essentially Dutch qualities of 'De Stijl'. Another term may be proposed here as the common denominator of all the features, in which 'De Stijl' expresses essentially Dutch qualities: austerity - the same calm and serene austerity which links across centuries a painting of 'De Stijl' and the old 'Wilhelmus', the Dutch national anthem, as it is played to-day. The latter is - quite apart from sentimental associations - one of the clearest expressions of the Dutch character or, in the words of Huizinga: 'characteristics of the Dutch spirit.'

As these features belong to a tradition that looks back over centuries, it is logical to ask for a manifestation of them in the past. Not that it is possible to enumerate an uninterrupted chain of works of art, one following upon the other, which would all manifest this trend - but it might be possible to point at several instances in Dutch art history, where a similar austerity, a parallel concern with objective means and mathematical precision could be demonstrated. These examples do not form a continuous artistic tradition together, finding its terms in recent art history, in 'De Stijl'; but on the other hand it is quite possible that they have been saved from comparative oblivion by the revival of similar trends in the work of 'De Stijl'. These historical parallels to 'DeStijl' could of course not beabstract art - the rise and development of abstract art being conditioned by the circumstances of the late 19th and the early 20th century - but they could show the same features, which distinguish 'De Stijl', as a Dutch phenomenon, from the other contemporary trends of abstract art: its concern for objective means of expression - straight lines and right angles, primary colours-and the importance they attach to the plane as the base of composition. In these earlier Dutch works of art, which we shall have to mention, subject-matter shall have to be found that enables the artists to realize the same compositional aims, which 'De Stijl' has made the exclusive aim of its work.

The two main examples to be cited in this context are the works of Pieter Saenredam and of Jan Vermeer van Delft. While doing so, we are perfectly aware of the fact, that these painters had other artistic aims as well, and that the realization of an objective composition by the means of straight lines and their disposition on a plane may have been for them, only of secondary impor-

tance. However, they exist and can be demonstrated as the manifestation of a well-defined artistic tendency: in the work of both these artists, mathematicaI repartition of the plane plays an important part. Both artists do, indeed, aim at the creation of illusory space, but they do so while respecting the plane of projection as such. The intersection of the perpendicular and perspective projection unes constitutes an abstracted plane of projection, lines are distributed according to a compositional scheme, that has a reference not only to the illusory space, but a meaning as far as they are related to the flat surface of the painters panel as well. As a matter of course, these laws of composition in the plane are existent in every painting-and Vantongerloo has examined them in a few examples-but they are not always as obvious and as clearly emphasized. Besides, in both Saenredam's and Vermeer's work, the relation of the mathematical elements-the vertical and the horizontal line-are of more importance than usual. Mathematical precision of a perspective - as in the case of Saenredam - leads, also, to precision and equivalence in the relation of the lines on the plane of projection. And in the case of Vermeer it may be noted that all his spacial compositions of interiors are shut off, towards the rear, by a wall running parallel to the plane of projection. This wall may be considered as a repetition, in space, of the plane of projection; on its surface, a delicate and lively play of horizontals and verticals, brought into the composition by such subject matter as a map or a framed picture, strikes the keynote for the entire linear composition of the painting.

These two examples point to an artistic trend in Dutch painting: the concern with the surface and its mathematical repartition. This phenomenon may be considered as a manifestation in art of an existing parallel feature in the Dutch mentality, produced by reasons, which we have tried to make clear. It may be considered from this point of view even more so, as it will be found difficult to indicate other examples of the same feature in the art of other European countries. Perspective construction in the Italian Renaissance, for instance, though deeply concerned with mathematics, gives much less attention to the linear results of the spacial composition upon the plane of projection. By comparison, the tendency towards an objective and mathematical way of expression may thus be considered as a feature somehow rooted in Dutch tradition and in Dutch - historically developed - character, though it cannot be denied that examples of an opposite tendency in Dutch art exist as well, and do even sometimes prevail. It depends on the other constituents of a period, which of these two opposite tendencies is going to prevail; but in the Netherlands the objective trend of expression was at least virtually extant, as a mould in which the ambitions of a period, that was equally concerned with the objective aspect of reality, could then be cast.

We have tried, in this part of the chapter, to explain why it can be accepted as logical that ‘De Sijl’ came into existence in the Netherlands. We have endeavoured to examine the aspects of its work which, by their character, are related to the country of origin in one way or another. Though we are perfectly aware of ‘De Stijl's’ international orientation and its aversion to all forms of national

limitation - and to all other limitations - we must, nevertheless, once more emphasize the fact that ‘De Stijl’ came into existence in the Netherlands and by the co-operation of several Dutch artists. It is therefore permissible - in view of the preceding investigations - to state with certainty that ‘De Stijl’ is indeed the Dutch contribution to 20th century art; that it is not likely to have come into existence anywhere else in Europe at that time and that it is, to a certain extent an expression of Dutch mentality, a manifestation of the ‘characteristics of the Dutch spirit’.

But it would be misjudging ‘De Stijl’ to end the chapter dealing with its origin, with a one-sided emphasis on the local contributions to its foundation. What we have tried to demonstrate in this chapter is, that ‘De Stijl’ owes its existence to a special constellation of facts in various directions, with local conditions as only one of the contributing factors. The most essential, of course, was the development in the field of the arts; the merging of the different tendencies of early 20th century art, with all their ultimate consequences, into one small group of friends and artists. But, while unravelling the skein of artistic tendencies that led to the constitution of ‘De Stijl’, we have tried to point out that there have been other factors as well, that aided and accelerated the amalgamation of various and distinct elements and their transformation into a new substance. The philosophical currents of the period, theosophy and the doctrine of Dr. Schoenmaekers, were among these factors, as were the general or the more specific characteristics of the early 20th century and the characteristics of ‘De Stijl's’ native country. Thus we have come to see the foundation of ‘De Stijl’ as a distinct historical event, as the intersection of various historical chains but, at the same time, as the expression of all the constituent factors, which helped to bring it into existence. Equipped with this knowledge, we will now examine ‘De Stijl's’ characteristics, its ambitions and its evolution.

Eindnoten:

46 *De Stijl, II*, p. 17
47 Mondriaan, Essays, p. 10
48 Mondriaan, Essays, p. 10
49 Mondriaan, Essays, p. 10
50 Mondriaan, Essays, p. 10
51 Mondriaan, Essays, p. 10
52 Mondriaan, Essays, p. 13
53 Mondriaan, Essays, p. 10
54 Mondriaan, Essays, p. 14
55 *De Stijl*, last number, p. 48
56 *De Stijl, II*, p. 23/24
57 Mondriaan, Essays, p. 13
58 *De Stijl, VII*, p. 38/39
59 *De Stijl, VII*, p. 39
60 *De Stijl, II*, p. 25
61 *Neue Schweizer Rundschau*, 1929, p. 44 (Van Doesburg)
62 *De Stijl*, Anniversary number, p. 39
63 *De Stijl, II*, p. 42

64 *De Stijl, I*, p. 49
65 Schoenmaekers, Beeldende Wiskunde, p. 53
66 *De Stijl, II*, p. 66/67
67 *De Stijl, II*, p. 62
68 *De Stijl, II*, p. 65
69 *De Stijl, II*, p. 23
70 *De Stijl, II*, p. 24
71 *Neue Schweizer Rundschau*, 1929, p. 373 (Van Doesburg)
72 Schoenmaekers, Het nieuwe Wereldbeeld p. 53
73 Schoenmaekers, Beeldende Wiskunde, p. 86
74 Schoenmaekers, Het nieuwe Wereldbeeld, p. 51
75 Schoenmaekers, Het nieuwe Wereldbeeld, p. 95
76 Schoenmaekers, Het nieuwe Wereldbeeld, p. 102
77 Schoenmaekers, Het nieuwe Wereldbeeld, p. 97
78 Schoenmaekers, Het nieuwe Wereldbeeld, p. 54
79 Schoenmaekers, Het nieuwe Wereldbeeld, p. 32
80 Mondriaan, Essays, p. 10
81 Schoenmaekers, Beeldende Wiskunde, p. 127
82 Schoenmaekers, Het nieuwe Wereldbeeld, p. 3
83 Schoenmaekers, Beeldende Wiskunde, p. 42
84 Schoenmaekers, Het nieuwe Wereldbeeld, p. 14
85 Schoenmaekers, Het nieuwe Wereldbeeld, p. 150
86 Schoenmaekers, Beeldende Wiskunde, p. 91
87 *De Stijl, II*, p. 21
88 Schoenmaekers, Het nieuwe Wereldbeeld, p. 39
89 *De Stijl, VI*, p. 5
90 Schoenmaekers, Beeldende Wiskunde p. 213
90a *De Stijl, I*, p. 16
91 *De Stijl, II*, p. 50
92 *Neue Schweizer Rundschau*, 1929, p. 628 (Van Doesburg)
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4 character and development of de Stijl

The artistic aims and the aesthetic principles

The preceding chapter has shown, that the work of 'De Stijl' was based, from its very beginning in 1917, on the acceptance and elaboration of a way of artistic expression which had hitherto been unprecedented. As Mr. Alfred Barr terms it: 'Two elements formed the fundamental basis of the work of "De Stijl", whether in painting, architecture or sculpture, furniture or typography; in form the rectangle; in colour the "primary" hues red, blue and yellow.'[176] The creation of the first paintings in this new way which excluded subject matter to the last degree, was immediately accompanied by the writings of their artists. It was their principal object to show that their new way of painting was indeed 'a new way', but that it was, on the other hand, a logical fulfilment of the demands which had been drawn from the very essence of painting and from its entire history. They considered the expounding of their theories as a task, as they wanted to help the public to attain a deeper comprehension of their work and of

all its implications. Therefore, the theoretical essays of 'De Stijl' painters and architects are introduced in the first number of *De Stijl* as follows: 'As the public has not yet come so far as to experience the new plastic beauty, it becomes the task of the specialist to awaken the layman's sense of beauty. The really modern, i.e. conscious artist, has a two-fold vocation. In the first place to create the purely visual work of art; in the second place to make the public susceptible to the beauty of pure visual art'.[177] This task was carried out by the reviews of *De Stijl* during the entire period of its existence: it accompanied the creation of all of the new works of 'De Stijl' with the specialist's commentary, explaining his aims and his views. But on the other hand, 'De Stijl's' editor, Van Doesburg, was aware from the very beginning of the dangers that an over-emphasis of the theoretical side of the work might bring about. We find, therefore, in the same introduction, a pointed warning against any possible precedence of the theoretical essays with regard to the artistic work of 'De Stijl': 'By giving the modern artist the opportunity to speak about his own work, the general prejudice, that the modern artist creates according to preconceived theories, will disappear. On the contrary: it will become evident that modern art does not emanate from previously determined theories, but - vice versa - that the principles are the result of the plastic work'.[178]

When speaking of 'the result of the plastic work', the artists of 'De Stijl' do not only refer to their own work, to their own development from a realistic beginning towards an abstract result. They mean, when speaking thus, a - teleological - evolution of painting towards the aim of abstract art. It was not only that their work had developed in this direction, they merely happened to be the vanguard: the entire history of painting was, logically and forcibly, leading towards this end. In order to put forward a similar argumentation, one has to submit the idea of an independent, an autonomous evolution of painting, of art in general. 'De Stijl' does indeed consider the autonomy of artistic development as an important basis for the growth of abstract art and more specially of 'De Stijl's'. Van Doesburg puts it quite clearly when writing: 'The art of painting can only be explained by the art of painting'[179] and Van der Leck formulates a parallel opinion, when contradicting an allegation, that the origin of 'De Stijl' was derived from architectural principles: 'Modern plastic painting has not proceded from architectural principles, or as a consequence of building and construction, but on the contrary: - it comes as a simplified manifestation of space from free painting after nature; it has developed from the art of painting, from painting that depicts life in all its variegations.'[180] And Van Doesburg's introduction to the second annual of *De Stijl* brings this problem into a somewhat wider context: 'What comes to definitely established expression in neo-plasticism: the equilibrated relationship of the particular to the general manifests itself as well, more or less, in the life of modern mankind, and it constitutes the basic cause of the social reconstruction of which we are the witnesses. As man has matured to oppose the domination by the individual and its caprice, the artist has ripened to oppose the individual in artistic expression: natural form and colour, emotion etc. This resistance,

which is based on matured internal values of the whole human being, on life in the strictest sense, on reasonable consciousness, is reflected in the whole evolution of art and more specially in the development of the last 50 years.'[181] Or, as he terms it in his 'Three lectures': 'Not a single artistic expression arises all of a sudden: one art springs from the other and all together they form a chain that embraces all centuries and all people. (...) This happens - and art shows us - as life is a constantly changing image. The art of painting is the constantly changing result of this image.'[182] When Van Doesburg considers the logicaiiy changing aspect of painting, Van der Leck on the other hand, stresses the unity in evolution: 'In the course of time, painting has developed apart from architecture, independently and, by experiment and destruction of the natural and the old, it has found its own essence, spiritually as well as formally'.[183]

This independent chain of development, this evolution towards a teleological aim can only be accepted by another abstraction: the abstraction of painting and its development from all other influences, the supposition of an autonomy of painting. Mondriaan formulates this thesis quite clearly in the first number of *De Stijl* when writing: 'The art of painting - the one and unalterable'[184] and Vantongerloo illustrates the axioms, on which his book is founded, in his *l'Art et son avenir*: 'The artist intuitively possesses the certainty of the existence of unity, but he is distracted by the period he lives in and this fact renders evolution slow and difficult.'[185] Whole paragraphs of his book have to furnish proof, that art, throughout the centuries, has always been based on the same esthetic principles; to this end, he analyses the composition of ancient paintings, f.i. Rogier van der Weyden's 'Deposition from the Cross' and, drawing the attention to the composition in opposition to subject matter, he writes: 'It is not the Holy Virgin, nor Christ, nor the box of balm, that render the work so beautiful, but it is the positions they hold'.[186] Composition, the aesthetic element in art, must therefore be considered essential and it is by force of this aesthetic principle, that all painting throughout the centuries form one chain of evolution. It is the abstraction of the temporal element in art, that dominates here and that becomes clear once more when Kok writes on the modern work of art: 'For the modern work of art denominations such as new, old-fashioned etc. do not exist in the usual and modish sense, because a work of art of purely aesthetic expression is timeless'. [187]

Having accepted this axiom, an evolution that leads towards a realization of the evolutionary end becomes indeed clear. Van Doesburg expresses this view in his pamphlet *Classical, baroque, modern* as follows: 'This artistic development has had an aim throughout the centuries: the realization of the notion of art, which consists of the following - to express exclusively and entirely in the way of art, the relationship between the inward and the outward, between spirit and nature'[188]. And as Van Doesburg thus formulates the aim of all art, Mondriaan in '*De Stijl*' points in a parallel direction by defining the origin of all art: 'As different as these artistic expressions may be in appearance, there is no difference in essence. Let us go back to the origin of the work of art: the emotion of beauty.'[189]

Art thus - according to ‘De Stijl's’ conception - springs from the emotion caused by beauty and aims at the exclusive realization of its aesthetic ambitions. The evolution of the arts has therefore to be consistent, uninterrupted and - the term may be permitted here - rectilinear. Van Doesburg gives his view on the consistency of this evolution: ‘The reason was, that the aesthetic had not yet achieved an independent existence. The liberation of art from the ties of morality, of religion, of nature, in order to become a free expression of the human spirit, is therefore an important part of the knowledge of artistic evolution.’[190]

All artistic development should therefore be considered from this point of view. The artists of ‘De Stijl’ did indeed look upon the development of the arts as on a consistent continuing chain, the end of which was modern abstract art. It is chiefly Van Doesburg who - with his astounding knowledge and his brilliant feeling for mutual relationships - developed surprisingly bold conclusions: ‘Means of expression: as means of expression have to be distinguished 1. extremely differentiated forms (man, flower, tree etc); 2. elements of form (sphere, cylinder, cone etc); 3. plastic elements (plane, line, colour). With these three categories, three categories of construction correspond, i.e. to the first natural (organic) construction, to the second: utility (anorganic, artificial) construction, to the third: plastic (artistic) construction. Historical development of art shows most clearly the succession of natural form, element of form, and plastic element.’[191] All the aspects of art history are therefore determined by this sequence.

‘De Stijl's’ interest, however, is especially concentrated on the last 50 years preceding its foundation. The recent developments in painting supplied the opportunity to link it up directly with ‘De Stijl's’ ambitions. It is obvious, that Cézanne meant a great deal to them; he is considered one of the important links in the chain of development. But, as we have seen in Mondriaan's personal reflections - the cubists are an even greater source of inspiration for Van Doesburg as well. ‘Where Cézanne had stopped, at the primary mathematical forms. From these he(Picasso) had to compose a new plastic language’.[192] But this direct evolution to abstract art shows itself even earlier: ‘All modern art is distinguished by a relatively greater freedom from the oppression of the subject. Impressionism emphasized the impression of reality more than its representation. After the impressionists, all art shows a relative negation of nature's aspects; the cubists delivered a further blow; the surrealists transformed it; the abstract artists excluded it.’[193] When writing about space-determination as an essential factor of his art and of neo-plasticism, Mondriaan writes: ‘In the course of culture space-determination is not only established by structure and form, but even by the mechanics of painting (brushwork, colour-squares or points - impressionism, divisionism, pointillism). It has to be emphasized that these techniques deal with space-determination and not with texture.’[194]

But cubism is the most essential phase in the general development, more than in the individual evolution of ‘De Stijl’ artists. Van Doesburg terms it as ‘the critical point in evolution. This, exactly, is the great importance of cubism: to have raised to the first rank these elements which, in illusionistic painting,

had held a secondary plane (such as plane, colour, proportion). This "Umwertung" of plastic qualities from secondary into primary factors is, indeed, the only essential feature in the evolution of painting towards an independent expression of relations. The fact that the cubist problem is set forth, is the revolutionary stage, the critical moment in painting more than any other. It is the stage at which all formal, tangible qualities (secondary) are transposed into essential qualities of relation (primary). It is obvious, that painting, after having conquered its primary plastic qualities of expression, needs but continue its further development. There is no other way, no other possible direction of evolution and only where it manifests the plastic urge by painting's essential and primary means of expression, it is indeed elementary and new plastic creation'[195] Mondriaan considers the fact of cubism from a slightly different angle, yet arrives at the same conclusions: 'Cubism brings form to a more definite, to a proper expression: it is already creating composition and relation, much more directly than ancient art. Thus cubism causes a work of art to be a phenomenon that has grown from human spirit and is therefore one with man.'[196]

So the entire evolution of art appears to the artists of 'De Stijl' as a constant development from natural forms to plastic elements. Van Doesburg summarizes this evolution when writing: 'By plastic expression the values of nature are transposed entirely or partly into symbolical values.'[197] At the end of this evolution and as its unavoidable consequence, 'De Stijl' came into existence. Mondriaan, when looking back on the evolution of neo-plasticism in one of his last essays, sees this evolution as an essential fact: 'If we follow the development of plastic art from the past to the present, we see a gradual detachment from the natural vision and a progressive determination of the real expressive means. We see no sharp division between the art of the past and modern art. The two expressions dissolve into each other, until in modern times a real difference of expressive means - forms, colours and spacial relationship - is created.'[198] Or, as he expresses the same thought much earlier in *De Stijl*: 'When painting had once freed itself from the natural representation of things, it arrived, of a necessity, at a further liberation. It had liberated itself to some extent from natural colour, even to some degree from natural form and now breaking with natural colour and natural form was to follow. This was achieved by expressionism (cubism,orphism etc.). And finally dissolution of all form into straight lines and of natural colour into flat, pure colour was to follow (abstract-real painting)'[199]

Starting from this conception of artistic evolution as an axiom, 'De Stijl' is indeed obliged to aim at the utmost purity and rigidity of plastic expression. When considering their plastic activity as the conclusion of all preceding artistic results, 'De Stijl' artists could indeed not admit of any compromise with previous artistic realizations, though admitting their quality. They had to be in strict opposition to the entire past. Van Doesburg makes a point of this fact, when he writes: 'Neo-plasticism indeed lacks every nuance. This is properly of an era, when painting still set to work with vague means, it is the principal characteristic of feigned plasticism. The luminists have already put

something else in its place: a striving for clarity, for distinctness of form and line and finally clearness and distinctness of composition. What in ancient painting was done by nuance, shades of tone from light to dark, from yellow to brown, all this has been deepened in neo-plasticism to a decisive establishment of relations - already prepared by the luminists - by the opposing of complementary colours.'[200]

In an essay, published in 1937, Mondriaan draws the conclusion of this theory of artistic evolution: 'Non-figurative art is created by establishing a dynamic rhythm of determinate mutual relations which excludes the setting up of any particular form. We note thus, that to destroy particular form is only to do more consistently what all art has done. The dynamic rhythm which is essential in all art is also the essential element in non-figurative work. In figurative art this rhythm is veiled. Yet we all pay homage to clarity.'[201] And in the same essay: 'We only need to continue and to develop what already exists. The essential thing is, that the fixed laws of the plastic arts must be realized. These have shown themselves clearly in non-figurative art.'[202] And finally this conclusive and coercive passage: '...if all art has purified and transformed and is still purifying and transforming these forms of reality and their mutual relations; if all art therefore is a continually deepening process: why then stop halfway? If all art aims at expressing universal beauty, why establish an individualist expression? Why not continue the sublime work of the cubists? That would not be a continuation of the same tendency, but on the contrary, a complete break-away from it and all that existed before it.'[203]

Indeed, this conception of the history of painting leads to unexpected and fascinating conclusions and perspectives. A history of painting could well be written from this point of view: the devaluation of the motive through history. It would indeed show, that in an earlier stage of painting the motive existed in the proper sense of the word: as the object, that set the artist in motion, as the given fact that caused an artist's specific conception and on which the artistic result largely depended. In the course of evolution, the motive became indeed more and more an occasion, by which an artist manifested his particular approach to nature, so that, at the present stage of development, if at all discernible, it is not much more than a faint memory of a quite casual fact, from which the process of abstraction had started. This would then be the history of the declining importance of the outer appearance to painting, at first for the benefit of individual expression, ultimately for the realization of generally existing laws of plastic composition. Up to a certain point it tallies well with the facts, as it accounts for the historical development from the sum of single works towards the more uniform *aeuvre* of an artist.

But this conception of art history finds - at least partly - its origin in the fact of art history itself. The conception of an autonomous history of art, developing in the direction away from the motive, is only possible by the abstraction of all the manifold aspects in a work of art, that are not directly related to its aesthetic properties. Van Doesburg is well aware of this fact - but as 'De Stijl' only draws the conclusions from its own version of the history of painting, he

also emphasizes the importance of these facts to neo-plasticism: 'When we experience the joy of beauty in seeing an Egyptian (.....) work of art, this is due to the fact, that we open ourselves to it without an ulterior motive (such as national, practical, religious etc.). We experience it as a product, for its own sake. In the course of time it has lost most of its practical elements and now stands before us as a timeless aesthetical product. As such, it is beautiful in all time, because the aesthetic or general is beyond time. For its contemporary beholder, such a product could not be enjoyed from the aesthetical point of view alone, as the plastic enjoyment, the joy of interior beauty, was lost in the religious atmosphere, which almost stifled the aesthetic atmosphere.'[204] Indeed, this quotation, more than any other, makes it obvious, in how far the contemporary approach to art history, 19th and early 20th century appreciation of works of art, are at the base of the aesthetic theories and ambitions of 'De Stijl'. The theory of a teleological development of the arts, of an evolution towards abstraction, is indeed - like the whole idea of 'l'art pour l'art' - born in, or rather from, a museum. It is the consequence of a consistent grouping of works of art according to schools and chronology, it is the conclusion drawn from a complete abstraction in these works of art. All these temporal factors, are characterized as secondary motives, though, to a contemporary, and often to the artist, they were of major, of dominating importance. These theories are a consequence of the statement which by no means originated from Van Doesburg, but is the accepted truth of a period, i.e. that 'beauty is for all time because the aesthetic of the general is beyond time.'

By the acceptance of this statement, 'De Stijl's' theories are ranged in the large current of 'l'art pour l'art'. Van Doesburg's articles and publications emphasize this fact over and over again: 'Art is an aim in itself. First, the impressionists discovered this fact about 1880, and therefore their device was "l'art pour l'art". The place that art should take in our society is: to supply aesthetic needs. Man evinces a need for the aesthetic besides his material needs and art is the obvious medium to supply this need. Aesthetic requirements are of a spiritual nature, that is to say they rise from our spirit. Where art supplies these needs, it is spiritually effective, that is to say, it satisfies our spirit. But when a work of art is in contradiction to itself, by having an other significance than an aesthetic one, it is either imperfect or no work of art at all. Such work masquerades as a work of art without being one.'[205] And a bit further in the same pamphlet: 'You will now ask me, what is the aim of the artist and my answer is: none at all. The artist produces a work of art through his nature, as his nature is aesthetical. There is not even room for an aim. What the artist desires is, that what he makes should be according to his nature, that is to say, that his product expresses his aesthetical experience of reality. For supposing that his nature is aesthetical, his experience will be similar and therefore aesthetical.'[206]

Starting from this principle, it is indeed possible to claim the 'independence' of art, as 'De Stijl' had done in its work and its artists, chiefly Van Doesburg, in various articles in their review: 'What only matters in art, is to use everything,

nature as well as science, as a means and not as an aim. Art is an aim in itself. It is for this reason that is has abandoned, in the course of time, all secondary intentions such as the awakening of religious feeling, the stimulating of humanitarian sentiments, etc. Plastic art has to express its aesthetical content by its proper, pure means of colour and form.'[207] Stating the fact of a development in the past, comes down to formulating a programme for his own period: 'Painting sought its aim in many a direction (.....). That is why it continued to live as a parasite. Painting in modern time however, depends on itself, it has to ensure its proper existence, not through literature, nature or allegory, but by its own plastic means. For as long as an art does not possess the faculty to transform by its means of expression an inner reality - f.i. an emotion - into an externally perceivable reality, it is not independent and, because art is independent, not art, either. Music, considered as the highest expression of feeling, has reached far ahead of painting in its way of expression.'[208] This liberation of painting from all outside influences and tendencies was considered, by 'De Stijl', as the most important task of its period: 'Therefore every artist who indulges his plastic conscience, in spite of subject-matter, has to fight current opinion. And as long as we fancy that a painting should have another content except an emotion, another form than a plastic form, as long as we cling to the notion that painting is limited to the more or less emotional representation of certain natural objects, this struggle will continue.'[209]. An independent art of painting, that was 'De Stijl's' claim, advocated by Van Doesburg in various articles and practically realized, as early as in 1917, by the paintings of the three 'Stijl' painters. We shall see, that their liberation of painting went even further than the other contemporary trends, for they were well aware of their task. 'To make painting independent, means: to ensure for it an existence as an expression in its own right, which may be admired for its own sake.'[210] Van Doesburg thus formulated the task. In the same pamphlet elsewhere he writes: 'The suggestive effect, which colour and form have on our souls contains the possibility of enjoying an art of painting for no other secondary feeling than the purely aesthetic one, that is to say for its own sake.'[211] This general statement is only a claim; but Van Doesburg and the other artists of 'De Stijl' are much concerned with its realization: 'The uncovering of the aesthetical essence is the most important principle of New Painting. Hence the expression "abstract" is derived; by this is principally intended, stripped of the naturalistic, the practical, the national and, generally speaking: the particular. As contrasted with traditional painting, where particularization was of primary importance, painting in our time considers generalization, that is to say the uncovering of the purely aesthetic in plastic features, as its principal value. This fact has brought painting to a higher level, it has made its aesthetical way of expression independent and has opened a number of possibilities.'[212]

Painting has thus become, since the first realizations of 'De Stijl' in 1917, an independent art, an art that manifests only itself. We shall have to examine later in how far 'De Stijl' went further in this direction than other, somewhat earlier or contemporary trends. But the fact 'De Stijl' had aimed at and which it had

succeeded in realizing as early as in 1917, was the liberation of painting, that is to say the creation of an art that was entirely free from associations. All standards, which do not pertain to painting are therefore excluded from the appreciation of a work of painting; every thought, trying to link up a work of art with any phenomenon of the outer world, is therefore out of place. Van-tongerloo summarizes this exclusive attitude towards painting, when writing in *De Stijl*: 'What do you say when you are in front of a painting with a general idea or without any idea? "It is well done, it is well rendered". The painter, therefore, rendered what he wanted to make. You have understood well enough.'[213] What a work of art demands, is not the spectator's activity, that starts from the painting and then tries, by way of associations and remembrances to find the links between the work of art and a series of phenomena; the work of art demands the spectator's exclusive concentration on its composition, on its structure and its development on the canvas. All other intentions should be excluded.

Van Doesburg formulates this claim: 'With regard to the contemplation of a work of art, we would like to speak about the aesthetic attention as the first and principal claim. This aesthetic attention means the opening up of one's receptivity.'[214] Thus, the new trend in painting did not only concern the artist, but the spectator as well. The latter was to be made familiar with a new manner of looking at works of art. And the artists were willing and ready to help. It is one of the reasons for the publication of the review *De Stijl*, as we have seen from the introduction: 'If the new ideas on modern plastic beauty have not yet penetrated to the general public, it becomes the task of the specialist to awaken the layman's sense of beauty (.....). For this reason a magazine of an intimate character has become necessary.'[215] And Van Doesburg has, once and again, emphasized this point of view, most clearly in a speech on the occasion of the opening of an exhibition in the Amsterdam Municipal Museum in 1929: 'The ancient painters, realists, naturalists, impressionists, have taught man to see nature; the painters have seen it first (.....). But the new painters, the painters of relationship, will teach people to see art, the art of painting. These painters, discovered it for the first time. There is a difference between "seeing" works of art and looking at paintings. The first suggests a plastic vision, the latter only an optical one.'[216]

Having cut all the ties which had linked art and the outer world, and having concentrated exclusively on the proper laws of art, it is not surprising that the artists of 'De Stijl' emphasize another aspect of their art: the element of play. Mondriaan writes in *De Stijl:* 'Art is a game and games have their rules.'[217] And there is a passage in Dr. Schoenmaekers' book *The new image of the world*, which enables us to get an approximate notion of Mondriaan's intentions: 'Life and repose, united and one, are nothing but life without an exterior aim, i.e. life for its own sake, life lived for and by itself. Life for life's sake, that is, in other words: playing. The one and continuous deed of creation is a game (.....). We human beings play as well.'[218] It is the disinterested and detached character of 'De Stijl's' art that makes Mondriaan speak of a game, that is only dependent on its own rules. And it is the same feature in the art of 'De Stijl' which shows it to

us as a culmination of 'l'art pour l'art', as the extreme consequence of this axiom.

The consistent pursuit of this idea has led to the liberation, to the independence of painting. It has led, as well, as we shall have to realize later, to the establishment of its proper means of expression. But it brought up, nonetheless, a limitation of painting, at least in regard to its public: it has limited the appreciation of painting to the aesthetically susceptible. Van Doesburg states this fact, in the 1929 speech quoted above: 'Plastic vision means seeing relations. For him, who does not hear musically, Bach and Stravinsky are quite the same: a sequence of sounds. "Hearing" or "seeing" of context is already a beginning of understanding. All those, who see the new art as only "ornament" must have seen ancient art exclusively as "subject-matter". They lack the organ, which is absolutely essential for the spiritual enjoyment of art; they had better abstain from judgment.'[219] This limitation of the appreciation of art to the aesthetically susceptible - in the case of painting the visually 'musical' - is an essential consequence of the liberation of art; it has caused a deepening of the gap between the artist and the public, it has prejudiced the position of the arts in regard to society. Yet, everyone is disposed to assign similar privileges to music. For modern society had accepted the notion that enjoyment was the only aim and the exclusive function of music, whereas it expected from painting an explanation of nature's appearance. We shall have to see later, in how far the artists of 'De Stijl' were prepared to answer this desire. But this readiness could, however, not change 'De Stijl's' determination to consider the work of art as an independent entity, or to deviate from the course which, in their opinion, history had stipulated for a further development of the arts, already from the start of impressionism: 'Painting became an art as painting, and the entire nature became a problem of relations, of tonal values to the impressionists. It was their aim to identify painting with this task. "How" became everything, "what" became a secondary matter. Or rather "how", became "what".'[220]

In this progressive striving for the liberation of painting, for the independence of art, 'De Stijl' has indeed gone further than its contemporaries and than the other trends of abstract art. For the other currents of abstract art the exclusion of subject-matter was a further step towards complete self-expression of the artist. The realization of his individual emotions had still been hampered by subject-matter, even by its remnants in cubism, as even geometric forms were an objective limitation of the artist's subjective approach. But 'De Stijl' considered the problem from a different angle: not the artist was 'De Stijl's' aim, but art. Mondriaan had well realized the possibility of abstraction in the direction of subjective expression, as he writes: 'A work of art depends exclusively on the will of its creator,'[221] but he refuses to exploit this fact in order to realize a subjective expression by abstract means. On the contrary, 'De Stijl' has always considered the desire for subjective expression as the most harmful and serious limitation of art. In its striving for purity in art, individualism and the desire for self-expression had to be considered as the worst enemy. Mondriaan, in all his writings, is the resolute opponent of every manifestation of individualism. Already in his first article in *De Stijl* where he gives a definition of style and of the

means to realize it, he attacks individualism: ‘The artistic temperament, the aesthetical vision, recognize style. Everyday's vision, on the other hand, does not see style, neither in art nor in nature. Everyday's vision is the vision of the individual, which cannot rise above the individual sphere. As long as matter is perceived individually, style cannot be seen. Thus everyday's vision stands in the way of all art. It does not want style in art, it desires detailed representation. The artist, on the other hand, wants style and searches for it; this is his struggle.’[222]

We shall have to see later that Mondriaan does not only oppose individualism in art, but in life as well. A passage from one of his articles in *De Stijl* does already point in this direction. ‘As we become freer from our attachment to the individual values, our idea of beauty will be gradually liberated from it as well, and vice versa. The liberation of our idea of beauty manifests and at the same time contains the evolution of our life.’[223] In another article, of some years later, he squarely opposes individualism to pure beauty: ‘If our material environment is to be of pure beauty, if it is to be healthy and directly sufficient for use, then it is necessary that it no more reflects the egoistic sentiments of our petty personality; that it does even no more reflect any lyrical expression, but that it be purely plastic.’[224] For Mondriaan, lyricism is the direct manifestation of individualism: ‘Lyricism is a remnant from humanity's childhood. From a time, when the lyre was known, but not electricity.’[224a] Painting will indeed never be fully independent, as long as individualism is still an active force, and neo-plasticism has therefore quite definitely to exclude individualism. Formulating his views about neo-plasticism, Mondriaan writes in 1942: ‘Actually it is an expression of our modern age. Modern industry and technics show parallel if not equal developments. Neo-plasticism should not be considered a personal conception. It is the logical development of all art, ancient and modern, its way lies open to everyone as a principle to be applied.’[225] But it is not only Mondriaan, who opposes individualism; several passages from the first manifesto of ‘De Stijl’ should be quoted here, in order to show that the struggle against individualism is part of ‘DeStijl's’ principles, and an important feature in its striving for the liberation of art: ‘There is an old and a new consciousness of time. The old is connected with the individual. The new is connected with the universal. The struggle of the individual against the universal is revealing itself in the world war as well as in the art of the present day. The war is destroying the old world with its contents: individual domination in every state. The new art has brought forward what the new consciousness of time contains: a balance between the universal and the individual. The new consciousness is prepared to realize the internal life as well as the external life. Traditions, dogma's and the domination of the individual are opposed to this realization. The founders of the new plastic art therefore call upon all who believe in the reformation of art and culture to annihilate these obstacles of development, as they have annihilated in the new plastic art (by abolishing natural form) that which prevents the clear expression of art, the utmost consequence of all art notion. The artists of today have been driven the whole world over by the same con-

sciousness, and therefore have taken part from an intellectual point of view in this war against the domination of individual despotism (.....).'[226]

In this opposition of individualism and subjectivism, which is clearly expressed in 'De Stijl's' manifesto, an essential mark of difference with all other currents of abstract art can be discerned. Kandinsky, for instance, writes about his Improvisation of 1913 - and this sentence could as well be applied to his entire work: 'The observer must learn to look at the picture as a graphic representation of a *mood*, and not as a representation of objects.'[227] And Malevitch, the founder of Suprematism in Russia, wrote about his first suprematist painting, also dating from 1913, as follows: 'I mean the supremacy of pure feeling or perception in the pictorial arts.'[228] and elsewhere: 'I have invented nothing. I have only felt the night and myself, and in it I have discovered the new thing which I have called suprematism. It expressed itself in a blank surface, that represented a square.'[229] In his 'Bauhausbuch', the Russian text of which has already been written in 1915, similar definitions can be found, for instance the following: 'An artist who does not imitate, but who creates, expresses himself - his works do not mirror nature; they are new facts, no less important than the fact of nature itself.'[230]

In opposition to these tendencies, 'De Stijl' clings to strict refutation of individualism. The liberation of art from all accidental features, the reduction to its pure elements, can indeed only be completed if a work is free of the most accidental of all its origins; the casual moods and the incidentals of its creator. Therefore one of the primary ambitions of 'De Stijl' has been to promote a means of expression, which excluded all casual moods and arbitrary expressions of the artist. The striving for a generally valid mode of expression is one of the reasons for the creation of neo-plasticism; it is also an expression of the fact that 'De Stijl's' ambition had always been directed not only towards the creation of works of art, but towards the creation of a style.

The ultimate ambition of 'De Stijl' is therefore not only abstract art and not only an artistic manifestation, that is no longer dependent on nature. If this would have been the case, the artists of 'De Stijl' might as well have contented themselves with a development of their art of before 1917. Their ultimate aim is to realize harmony and equilibrium *objectively*, with a similar objectivity as science had reached in establishing the laws of nature. Everything that could hamper this objectivity had therefore to be excluded from their work. And the only means of expression by which it would be possible to manifest this harmony objectively were the elementary plastic means of 'De Stijl': straight lines in rectangular opposition, and the primary colours.

'Unconsciously, every true artist has always been moved by the beauty of line, colour and relationship for their own sake and not by what they may represent.'[231] The beauty of these plastic elements is therefore the only possibility of expressing beauty objectively, without interference from nature or from any other incidental. 'Finally as a consequence, in abstract-real painting composition itself is rendered visible. For the composition only becomes positive in ancient

art, when subject matter has been subtracted; on the other hand it appears directly in abstract-real painting, because there is an abstract means of expression.'[232] And it would not be sufficient either, to have an abstract means of expression, but the means of expression in its turn, has to be objective, exact: 'Abstract-real painting is capable of mathematically aesthetic expression, because it possesses an exact, mathematical means of expression. This means of expression is definitely established colour. The definite establishment of colour implies: 1, the reduction of natural colour to primary colour, 2. the reduction of colour to flatness, 3. the inclosure of colour, so that it appears as a unity of rectangular planes.'[233]

So by a progressive purification of its means, 'De Stijl' arrived at the manifestation of its ambition: the creation of an autonomous beauty in painting. 'Artistic culture, tending towards the purest and most real manifestation of the essential in art, had to lead, of a necessity, towards an "art without subject-matter". The forms, used by this art, we can call "neutral", as they do not have a limiting character. Geometrical forms can be counted among these, by their universal expression. Straight lines, in rectangular intersections, may be considered the utmost consequence of the abolition of individual form, as it is the intersection of the lines which necessarily forms the rectangles.'[234] The use of this elementary means of expression bestowed the independence as well as the objectivity on painting: 'With the exception of non-figurative art, there seems to have been a lack of realization of the fact that it is possible to express oneself profoundly and humanely by plastics alone, that is, by employing a neutral plastic means, without the risk of falling into decoration or ornament. Yet all the world knows that even a single line can arouse emotion (.....). In general, people have not realized that one can express our very essence through neutral constructive elements; that is to say we can express the essence of art. (.....) But everybody agrees that art is only a problem of plastics. What good then is subject-matter?'[235]

Van Doesburg, who had already advocated abstract art for some time, but, who could not be satisfied with Kandinsky's results, which he had closely followed, states the perfection of the new artistic manifestation: in this way, the aim of the plastic artist has indeed been realized most exactly; the aim which is to 'create plastic harmony and to give truth in the way of the arts' - illustrating once more by these words 'De Stijl's' eagerness for objectivity, which could not have been realized by the preceding schools of painting, which followed nature. 'The organic unity is based on three fundamental elements: 1. the spiritual state or the emotion, 2. colour, 3. form. Painting, considered as a plastic art, is nothing but finding the right balance between these three fundamental elements. We see therefore,that in organic unity nature can be excluded completely and that a purely plastic work of art is free from natural elements as well as from sentiment.'[236]

Painting must concentrate upon the proper means; indeed, 'how' becomes 'what' and it is not a false claim of 'De Stijl' to have achieved the culture of 'l'art pour l'art'.

'The strongest form of expression of every art is to be found in the exclusive use of its proper means.'[237] This statement by Van Doesburg is completed by the negative assertion: 'Plastic arts may leave the interpretation of stories, tales, etc. to poets and writers (.....). Arms, legs, trees, landscapes, are not pictorial means. The pictorial means are: colours, forms, lines, and planes.'[238] In this context, Van Doesburg once more joins the idealist tradition by quoting Poussin as an example: 'The painter concerns himself more with aesthetic intentions than with natural forms.'[239]

But not only nature, every other outward interference should be excluded, in order to secure the painting's independent objectivity: 'When the new plastic artists use mathematics, they may be compared to a Renaissance artist using anatomy. No more can we make a Renaissance work of art by a great deal of anatomical knowledge, than a modern work of art with a thorough knowledge of mathematics (including the four-dimensional). By mere mathematics we shall never be able to compose a painting - with (the aid of) mathematics, however, we may do very well. One can learn the means: their use however, is the hereditary rights of genius. What matters in art is to use everything, nature as well as science, as a means and not as an aim.'[240]

The exclusive means of painting, therefore, are colours, lines and planes. But they were more: by themselves they manifested plastic harmony. Van Doesburg explains this fact by writing: 'Gradually, the material became obvious to the artist as being the bearer of the content.'[241] In these few words, the early years of 'De Stijl's' development are summed up. Mondriaan, in his articles in *De Stijl* and in his later retrospective essays, fills in the details of this broad conception: 'It is to be understood that one would need a subject to expound something named "spiritual riches, human sentiments and thoughts." Obviously, all this is individual and needs particular forms. But at the root of these sentiments and thoughts there is one thought and one sentiment; these do not easily define themselves and have no need of analogous forms in which to express themselves. It is here that neutral plastic means are demanded. For pure art, then, the subject can never be an additional value, it is the line, the colour and their relations which must bring into play the whole sensual and intellectual register of the inner life.....not the subject'[242] And more specifically about the realizations of 'De Stijl': 'We may call those (forms) neutral which do not evoke individual feelings or ideas. Geometrical forms being so profound an abstraction of form, may be regarded as neutral.'[243] These statements coincide with Mondriaan's - and 'De Stijl's' - artistic development: 'To create pure reality plastically, it is necessary to reduce natural form to the constant elements of form and natural colour to primary colour. The aim is not to create other particular forms and colours with all their limitations, but to work towards abolishing them in the interest of a larger unity. The problem was simplified for me, when I realized two things: a. in plastic art, reality can be expressed only through the equilibrium of dynamic movement of form and colour and b. pure means affords the most effective way of attaining this. When dynamic movement is established through contrasta of oppositions of the expressive means, rela-

tionship becomes the chief preoccupation of the artist who is seeking to create equilibrium. I found that the right angle is the only constant relationship and that, through the proportion of dimensions, its constant expression can be given movement, that is, made living.'[244] This quotation applies to the very first creations of 'De Stijl' where rectangular composition is matched with pure colour. The next one deals with the period of 1918, immediately before the definite creation of neo-plasticisrn: 'In my early pictures, space was still a background. I began to determine forms: verticals and horizontals became rectangles. They still appeared as detached forms against a background, their colour was still impure. Feeling the lack of unity, I brought the rectangles together: space became white, black or gray; form became red, blue or yellow. Uniting the rectangles was equivalent to continuing the verticals and horizontals of the former period over the entire composition. It was evident that rectangles, like all particular forms, obtrude themselves and must be neutralized through the composition. In fact, rectangles are never an aim in themselves, but a logical consequence of their determining lines, which are continuous in space; they appear spontaneously through the crossing of horizontal and vertical lines. Moreover, when rectangles are used alone without any other forms, they never appear as particular forms, because it is contrast with other forms that occasions peculiar distinction.'[245] The course of development is concluded with a quotation, regarding the years of 1919 and 1920, thus the constitution of neo-plasticism: 'Later, in order to abolish the manifestation of planes and rectangles, I reduced my colour and accentuated the limiting lines, crossing them one over the other. Thus the planes were not only cut and abolished, but their relationship became more active. The result was a far more dynamic expression. Here again I tested the value of destroying peculiarities of form and thus opening the way to a more universal construction.'[246] The entire development towards neo-plasticism has been dictated by the 'gradual perception, that the material is the bearer of the content.' And the further development, Van Doesburg's creation of elementarism and the schism in 'De Stijl' resulting from this fact, were repercussions of the same facts. When Van Doesburg in 1925 introduced the diagonal into neo-plasticist composition, he did so in order to increase the 'dynamic expression', to which Mondriaan referred. 'The rectangular composition, in which extreme tension, horizontal and vertical, had been neutralized, kept - as a remnant of classical composition - a certain homogeneity with the statics (support-charge) of architecture. Contra-composition (or anti-statical composition) has liberated itself from this homogeneity. Its contrasting relation to architecture is (but on another level) to be compared with the contrast between white and flat architecture and gray, curved nature. Elementarism only has liberated painting completely from convention.'[247]

Another quotation goes even further: 'As neo-plasticism had already rejected (and quite rightly so) symmetry, which is associated to our corporal external structure, it would have led in its way to reject rectangular composition as well as the only possible means of expression, as it is associated with our natural organic structure. This is what elementarism achieves: by the suppression of

rigid statica it awakens in us a new spiritual motion, accompanied by a new vision.'[248]

Mondriaan's opinion on what he termed 'a deviation from "De Stijl's" original conception' is no less revealing: 'Van Doesburg kept the rectangular relationship of the vertical and horizontal lines, but turned them to a 45-degree position. This in opposition to the natural aspect of reality. He called his conception "elementarism". In this way he put the accent on the expressive means, while I saw relationship of equal importance with these means.'[249] The difference in the ideas of Van Doesburg and Mondriaan, which came to light as a result of elementarism, is deeply rooted in the difference of opinion about the essence of painting, which developed between the two artists and which we have to examine later. But the entire evolution of 'De Stijl' was due to a desire to develop this principle: 'the material is the bearer of the content.'

From this exclusive desire for purification results 'De Stijl's' conception of plastic laws. Having once rejected all outer interference, the artists of 'De Stijl' had to concentrate on their means and on composition, in order to express harmony. Oud, in the first volume of *De Stijl*, imputes impurity to a confusion between aims and means: 'Impurity in art as well as in religion arises as soon as means are considered as aims. Thus painting could give subject-matter without art; building, details without art; religion, rites without faith; philosophy, reason without wisdom.'[250] On the other hand, Mondriaan emphasizes the possibilities of pure painting: 'Painting is capable of a consistent straightening and interiorization of the means of expression, without leaving the domain of these means of expression.'[251] And, in the first number of *De Stijl*, he gives a definition of his conception of the laws and aims of painting: 'Thus neo-plasticism means the manifestation of definitely established aesthetic relations. It is built up in painting by the artists of today, as the consequence of all preceding plastic manifestation - it has been realized in painting, as painting is the least bound of all arts. The whole profundity of modern life can be reflected in a painting.'[252] Having once developed the new and purified means of expression, it was 'De Stijl's' self-imposed task to express harmony by the composition of these means and to bring the expression of harmonious beauty to ever greater perfection. Van Doesburg continues to propound this problem: in the last, memorial number of *De Stijl* we find notes such as: Equilibrium and perfection are more essential than form or object. If it is possible to arrive at the creation of a work of art by these two superior qualifies, I ask myself, of what 'use' are accidentais such as 'form' and 'object?'[253] We have thus to interpret the statement, that 'the material is the bearer of the content' in such a way, that the means of expression can manifest harmony, an objective beauty, which is not to be realized by other means. 'This is the beautiful feature in the artist's battle that, again and again, he seeks the pure expression of harmony. Every time he expresses a new vision of beauty, he will experience more strongly that harmony, manifested in the present world, is such a force that a visual representation is unable to render it.'[254]

'De Stijl's' search therefore goes towards the discovery of the laws of harmony

and the possibility of applying these laws. 'De Stijl' has found the solution of this problem in the spacial and visual relationship of its abstract expressive means. Vantongerloo is very much concerned with this problem, as his mathematical inclinations urge him towards a scientific approach. In his recent work which contains many retrospective thoughts, he writes: 'What importance should be given to nature and what importance to the abstract? This study aims at finding the role of each and at formulating an attitude towards them from the point of view of art. We shall have to conclude that, where the arts are in question, we must not only abandon nature entirely, but absolutely ignore it, since nature lies totally outside the sphere of art.'[255] The task of the artist is therefore, to create something which is unprecedented in nature and which is only related to the world of natural appearance by a coincidence of its lawfulness.

'As the man of science, the philosopher and the artist make use of abstract forms, (.....) every science needs calculation and reaches its results by abstract means. A machine is not composed with any natural object. Abstract farms, obeying a law, are given to material, for instance, the construction of a bridge, which obeys weight, the aeroplane, which obeys stability. Thus everythng obeys a fundamental law(.....). Thus the artist disposes of abstract means. For all that, the line, which does not represent a natural object, is the most perfect materialization of art. Natural lines do not represent the image of a thought, but a local image; the realization of a natural object is not the materialization of spirit(.....). A line, in relation to another line, speaks to us about science, about philosophy, even about art. If the relations are equilibrated, the lines give us a sensation of aesthetics.'[256] Vantongerloo thus stresses the need for precision and accuracy in art - he emphasizes the conformity of art and science. We have already seen in the first chapter, that science has indeed been one of the important sources of inspiration to 'De Stijl', and Vantongerloo wants to continue and to deepen this conformity: 'For art is a science and not a fancy. Plastic art, that is, the pure means: colour and volume. The work of art is a composition by purely plastic means, directed towards an aesthetical end. So the work of art manifests unity.'[257]

To create such a work, with a precision that almost equals that of science, a complete command and a thorough knowledge of the means of expression are needed: 'All plastic art and particularly abstract art shows the importance of the fact already emphasized that forms with their colours have a proper expression which is independent of our vision. The same fact is to be observed concerning the elements of these forms. It is not superfluous to realize that a square is not a circle, a straight line is not a curved line. The more neutral the plastic means are, the more the unchangeable expression, of reality can be established. We can consider all forms relatively neutral that do not show any relationship with the natural aspect of things or with any "idea". Abstract farms or dislocated parts of forms can be relatively neutral.'[258] Forms which bear any relation to the outer world of appearance, are therefore rejected, as they are only capable of disturbing the equilibrium of the work of art; at least they have to be completely neutralized, or straightened. 'In order that art may be really abstract,

in other words, that it should not represent relations with the natural aspect of things, the law of denaturalization of matter is of fundamental importance.'[259] This denaturalization is not only applied to apparent farms, but even to categories such as space: '...in painting three-dimensional space has to be reduced to two-dimensional appearance. This is necessary not only to conform to the canvas, but to destroy the natural expression of form and space. Only then is the equivalent space determination, which abstract art requires, possible in painting.'[260] Through denaturalization by abstraction of all natural forms, 'De Stijl' artists approach the laws of plastic composition. Any natural element would be as alien to their composition (and would therefore upset it entirely) as a non-arithmetic symbol would be in a mathematical equation. And an equation can only conform to its laws, if its material is adequate. Then too, it is capable of representing reality in an abstract way. In this way the following lines of Mondriaan's essay may be understood: 'Intrinsic reality - dynamic movement - is established in abstract art by the exact determination of the structure of form and space, in other terms through the composition. In painting, structure is established through the division of the canvas by means of forms (planes) or lines.'[261] This notion of space-determination is further explained in another passage of his essays: 'The action of plastic art is not space-expression but complete space-determination. Through equivalent oppositions of form and space, it manifests reality as pure vitality. Space-determination is here understood as dividing empty space into unequal but equivalent parts by means of forms or lines. It is not understood as space-limitation. This limitation determines empty space to particular forms.'[262]

When considering example III, given by Van Doesburg in his Bauhausbuch, it becomes clear what is meant by space-determination and by the rejection of space-limitation. There, Van Doesburg exemplifies the transposition of natural forms into an abstraction and he explains this transposition by a series of his paintings, starting from the motive of a cow. He quotes the significance of a cow to the peasant, the veterinarian, the butcher, the cattle dealer, and shows that this significance influences their respective visions. Then he opposes to these aspects the vision of the artist, which is entirely disinterested as far as the object is concerned: 'he does not see details, as the peculiar characteristics of the object do not interest hum.'[263] He is not concerned with the particular limitations but only with general importance of the object as part of spacial reality. Thus the artist develops a spacial approach to reality, an approach which may seem strange and useless to the public: 'The artist speaks, from his inner and outer world, in words and mental images, which are current for him, as they are partly factors of the world where only he belongs. The public however, has another inner and outer world and the words by which it expresses its notions, characterize this world completely. It stands to reason that the perceptions of different people, everyone having another inner and outer world, cannot correspond.'[264] We shall have to see what the significance of the arust's vision can be for the public, we shall thus have to examine the moral significance of abstraction.

After having broached a similar example - that of the viewing of a tree by men of various professions, and by the artist, Van Doesburg concludes as follows: 'It is, however, sufficient if we see from these examples that the artist's perception is different in its nature to that of the layman; from this fact we may derive the following thesis: that the artist's task is to explain the image of the world by way of aesthetics, that is to say, according to art'[265] This conception of art does indeed exceed aesthetical perfectionism, but on the other hand, it implies it by necessity. Without a precise handling of the abstract means of expression, such a task could not be fulfilled. Van Doesburg stresses this fact in his methodological lecture, reprinted in the Bauhausbuch: 'In summarizing the various thoughts, developed about this subject, we may say that only the abstract accents are of importance to the artist and that only when they exclusively prevail, his work has aesthetical value. Having formulated the notion of aesthetics as a denomination of the idea of the fundamental essence of being, we shall have no difficulty in acknowledging the unequivocal manifestation of this idea as being the essence of all art.'[266]

The rendering of 'world's harmony' - that, therefore, is 'Stijl's' most ambitious conception of art. And as this harmony does not become apparent in the likeness of any particular object, as it is also an abstraction, the means of expression are necessarily abstract. That is what Mondriaan means when writing: 'Art has never been a copy of nature, for such a copy would not have been strong enough to evoke human emotion. The living beauty of nature cannot be copied: it can only be expressed.'[267] It is in order to attain this aim, that he warns time after time against the danger of subjective approach: 'For nature cannot be copied and the predominance of our subjective impression has to be conquered. These plastic exigencies produced abstract art. Abstract art has grown out of the abstraction of forms, but it is not a simple abstraction. It is rather, construction after decomposition of forms. Avoiding the formation of limiting form, it can approach an objective expression of reality.'[268]

After having examined the question of 'De Stijl's' aesthetical principles and its means of expression, we have now approached the problem of the content of its work. Abstract art, or, as it has been called as well, non-objective art, has always been considered as having, by definition, no content at all. In spite of this notion, it is important to emphasize the significance of the content of 'De Stijl's' work and, at the same time, to stress the fact that it is indeed 'non-objective' only in so far as it is not concerned with objects. The answer to the problem is given, clearly and explicitly, by Van Doesburg: 'The modern work of art, indeed, lacks subject-matter. But it does not lack a subject. This subject is of a pictorial nature, it is aesthetical balance, unity, harmony in a higher sense.'[269] And Mondriaan completes this thesis about the content of 'De Stijl's' work when writing: 'The laws which in the culture of art have become more and more determinate, are the great hidden laws of nature which art establishes in its own fashion.'[270]

This task, which 'De Stijl' had set itself, demands indeed an abolition of all

particular appearances; it demands even more a complete exclusion of subjective sentiments. It calls on man's clear, all-embracing vision and abhors all sentimental attachment to specific objects. The task ‘De Stijl’ had set itself - to make visible the laws of nature - cannot be trifled with by the concern for any particular object. It is with this intention-that Mondriaan writes: ‘We come to see that the principal problem in plastic art is not to avoid the representation of objects, but to be as objective as possible.’[271]

The desire for objectivity is the key to ‘De Stijl's’ entire aesthetical conception. ‘De Stijl’, as we have seen, is not concerned with the representation of objects; it is only concerned with the structure of things and not with their appearance. lts foremost aim is an objective, visible demonstration of the laws which reign over this structure. As its content is an abstraction, the means of expression have to be abstract as well; they have to be objective, as the content does not allow any interference of the subject. And they have to be dynamic, as the content which they try to express is motion itself. ‘De Stijl’ has striven for an elementary means of expression, because the content to be expressed had to be universal.

This summary of ‘De Stijl's’ principles defines the social task of ‘De Stijl’. A work of ‘De Stijl's’ neo-plasticism cannot be a direct appeal to the spectator, a stimulus towards any particular activity or action. The task of the work of art in view of the spectator has been changed, it has been more assimilated to that of the scientist: its primary importance is the creation of a method - alanguage - which is capable of expressing the laws of nature, and which may be handled by others to realize special results. Mondriaan stresses the importance of this aspect: ‘Though an aim in itself, neo-plasticism educates the conscious universal vision, as natural painting did in regard to the unconscious, natural vision.’[272] And, in one of his later essays, he emphasizes the fact that this vision has to be dynamic: ‘In plastic art the static balance has to be transformed into the dynamic equilibrium, which the universe reveals.’[273] He thereby intends that all universal events follow the laws of dialectics and that the language of art has - therefore - to be dialectical as well: ‘It must be emphasized that it is important to discern two sorts of equilibrium: 1. a static balance and 2. a dynamic equilibrium. The first maintains the individual unity of particular forms, single or in plurality. The second is the unification of forms or elements of forms through continuous opposition. The first is limitation, the second is extension. Inevitably dynamic equilibrium destroys static balance. Opposition requires separation of forms, planes and lines. Confusion produces a false unity.’[274]

‘De Stijl’ has indeed created a new artistic language. The artistic means of expression, until the beginning of the 20th century, had been dependent on objects and were - therefore - statical. But man, in the 20th century, is no more concerned with matter but with energy in nature. It is ‘De Stijl's’ achievement to have created an artistic language, which was in conformity with the laws of nature, that is to say with the activity of human thought, by being dialectical and dynamic. It is only for this property of the new language, that Mondriaan could define the aim of neo-plasticism: ‘It is the task of art to express a clear

vision of reality.'[275] And it is in regard to this content of 'De Stijl's' work - which has now to be examined - that we have to understand Van Doesburg's thesis, which may otherwise seem presumptuous: 'The aim of nature is man, the aim of man is style.'[276]

The content: Universal vision

> 'What we understand by abstract art: It is the attempt to bring about the world's own speech, instead of the language of our soul, which is moved by the world's image' (Franz Marc).

Having until now examined 'De Stijl's' aesthetic principles, we have to study the essence of its 'oeuvre' - the subject, 'De Stijl' artists wanted to present visibly without the use of subject-matter. We have already seen that it has been 'De Stijl's' ambition to attain - by abstract expression - a clear vision of reality. But it will become apparent in the course of our investigation, that 'De Stijl' was not concerned with the mere appearance of reality. What it tried to discern and to render visible, was the essential, the unchangeable qualities of reality.

'Art - though an aim in itself - is, on the other hand, a means as well as religion by which the universal may be revealed, that is to say, plastically contemplated.'[277] With this passage from the first volume of *De Stijl*, Mondriaan hints at 'De Stijl's' general trend of thought, at 'De Stijl's' conception of the world and of life. For it would be erroneous and deceptive to consider 'De Stijl' as a movement which confined itself to art: 'De Stijl' had a firmly established conception of its own with regard to life and reality and this conception was to be and has been expressed by its plastic abstract means. It is difficult to say which of the two existed first: the aesthetic expression or the general conception of life - they are so closely united that they cannot be easily separated, though with Mondriaan, the general conception of life most certainly was the primary cause. They certainly developed one another and both reached their mature manifestation in the paintings of 1917. Since then, the content - once established by its form - may be deduced and can be treated separately.

The progress of the search for the universal, the absolute reality, is adequately illustrated by a quotation from Mondriaan's notebooks, published by his friend the writer M. Seuphor: 'What captivates us at first does not hold us afterwards (like toys). If one has loved the surface of things for a long time, one will finally look for something more. This "more", however, is already present in the surface one wants to go beyond. Through the surface one sees the inner side of things, it is as we regard the surface, that the inner image takes shape in our souls. This is the image we are to represent. For the natural surface of things is beautiful, but the imitation of this surface is lifeless. Things give us everything, their representation can give us nothing.'[278] From this quotation it becomes clear, that the universal vision, the absolute conception of the world, was born with the artists of 'De Stijl' not by mere speculation, but in the way of the painter: by observation and contemplation. Van Doesburg too had been developing in the same direction during the period since 1913: the influence of Kandinsky's

paintings and writings led him away from tangible reality, towards a search for the 'spiritual in art' and not in art alone. That is why he had read Hegel and he quotes his work in this context: 'The spirit is a thing, infinitely superior to nature; in it, divinity manifests itself more than in nature. (Hegel). Thus it stands to reason, that works wrought according to the spirit will deviate from natural forms and the more or the less so, or entirely, in proportion to the state of distinctness of the spirit.'[279] And we find similar expressions with all 'De Stijl' artists, even with Gino Severini, who was comparatively an outsider within the group: 'The task of our modern art is to seek to determine the direction, the aim and the extension of the phenomenon and to bring it into relation with the whole universe, that is to say, to all other phenomena from which it is not really separated, belonging to the domains of our knowledge, apart from any notion of time and space. This brings us close to the platonic idea.'[280]

Indeed, 'De Stijl's' philosophical conception, its image of the word, has not been so very remote from the platonic idea. It is not surprising, that there can be found, in *De Stijl*, quotations from Aristotle and from Plotinus, all emphasizing the same conception: the existence of a creative force, governing the appearance of matter. 'De Stijl's' conception of this creative force did, however not directly spring from the ancient thinkers - it was influenced more by modern science. For modern science had not only taught it the permanence of energy, it had shown the identity of energy and matter and had already hinted at the possibility of the creation of matter out of energy. The results of modern science and the philosophical systems of ancient thought were both adopted by 'De Stijl'. Indeed, they found a confirmation of their ideas in a sentence by Plotinus, which is quoted in *De Stijl:* 'Art stands above nature, because it expresses the ideas, of which the objects of nature are the defective likeness. The artist, relying only on his own resources, rises above capricious reality towards reason, by which and according to which, nature creates.'[281] In 'De Stijl's' conception of reality, an idea on nature's construction is therefore presupposed. Huszar writes of this fact in the first annual of *De Stijl:* 'It is therefore logical that this method is preceded by a different conception of life. The r-cubist (another denomination of the neo-plasticist) has to believe in the absolute (reality) before he can work in it, as the means he uses to express his spiritually-aesthetical aims, are the result of his conception of life.'[282] And another instance, quoting Mondriaan: 'Neo-plasticism arises from the notion of a universal conception of life. The universal can beexpressed by pure relations between the subject and the universal; of the one extreme to the other.'[283] The universal force in which the artists of 'De Stijl' believed and which they tried to express, had been revealed to them not only by speculation but by their own activity: the observing of nature. 'Pure observation makes us see the original unity as being the permanent force in all things. It makes us realize, that it is this force which all things have in common. The essential generality has been termed by Aristotle as "substance", as that which is, as the thing by itself, as that which exists by itself, independent of accidentals as size, form, properties, which only shape the exterior, by which substance reveals itself. Thus this exterior is only by means

of substance, what it is to us. As the substance is the permanent force, direct expression of the universal (that is, direct manifestation of the substance) is not only justified, but necessary, as the permanent force is the highest value.'[284] This is how Mondriaan expresses his conviction of the existence of this creative force; from this fact he deduces the task of art and its content: 'It is spirit, that makes him become man. Man - but it is the task of art to interpret the super-human. Art is intuition. It is the pure expression of this incomprehensible force, which works universally and which we can therefore call the universal.'[285] It is this force that leads art, that leads 'De Stijl' towards its goal. And in Mondriaan's article we find this amazingly mystical passage: 'The universal (the source of all art) never errs.'[286]

It is with this certainty, with the intention of finding the universal force, in all of nature's manifestations, that the artists of 'De Stijl' observe reality: 'Nature too, shows style (.....). For everything reveals the universal according to its own fashion.'[287]. And it is not the variety of manifestations, that is important, but the unity of all these, by the one creative force: To the neo-plasticist the universal is not a vague idea, but a living reality that manifests itself visibly and audibly. For him it is that which becomes apparent in and by the individual, what it holds as its essence, what makes it a unity. That, therefore, which is always the same, the unchangeable. This unchangeable which manifests itself by instability, is equilibrated relation of position by equilibrated relationship of dimensions (measures) and of colour(tone) and non-colour (non-tone).[288] By this unity and its various manifestations, life attains its form: 'The quantity, too, creates rhythm for us. This is as it were, the plastic expression of life for us men and it unites the particular into one.'[289] All the appearances of nature are thus considered as manifestations of this force: 'Expansion - an exteriorization of the active primary force - creates form, corporality, by growth, annexation, construction etc. Form comes into existence when expansion is limited. As the universal is the fundamental force (because all action comes from it) it is to be fundamental in plastic expression as well. If it is to be consciously acknowledged as fundamental, it has to be expressed clearly and directly.'[290]

The conception of an essentially universal force therefore determines 'De Stijl's' vision of reality. The expression of this force is the content of 'De Stijl's' painting and tangible reality is only a defective manifestation of this force: therefore, art can never be based on the appearance of reality. All the artists of 'De Stijl' adhere to this conception. Van Doesburg sees this force in all the manifestations of life: 'The significance of life is the manifestation of one and the same thing always in a different manner.'[291] Kok, 'De Stijl's' philosopher, describes this force: 'Every form (object) is a coagulation of universality.'[292]

The mystical accent, which may sometimes be heard in the sentences quoted above, most probably finds its origin in the work of Dr. Schoenmaekers. His system was based on a similar conception of universalism and, by this fact, it may have obtained so great a hold on the founders of 'De Stijl'. It is indeed a remarkable fact that Schoenmaekers had already termed this universal force

as ‘style’. ‘A positively mystical contemplation of the essence of nature's form will recognize more and more clearly the severe, absolute style in the depth of life and it will therefore easily discern every rippling disturbance that opposes style.’[293]. Elsewhere in his *New image of the world* he writes: ‘Who can hear the variations of a musical theme most clearly? He who knows best the essence of the theme and keeps hearing it in all the variations. He hears the variations spring from the theme, he hears variations as variations.’[294] A similar universal conception of nature can be found in Dr. Schoenmaekers book, indeed emphasized, in a way which reminds one of mystical writers as well as of theological eloquence: ‘He (the positive mysticist) does not see the particular beside the absolute, but he sees the particular as being one with the absolute, as its proper infelt opposite. He sees the particular as the playful game of severe absoluteness.’[295]

For the artists of ‘De Stijl’, painting is one of the most appropriate means to manifest this universal force; it is in their opinion a force which is most clearly apparent to the eye: ‘Indeed, a means to unite abstractly, that is consciously, with the universal, is given to man by aesthetical contemplation. Every contemplative activity - as the disinterested contemplation defined by Schopenhauer - raises man above his natural nature. According to this nature, all his activities are directed at his own improvement, at the maintenance of his own individuality. His spiritual ambitions as well do not exist for the sake of the universal - as he does not know it. But in the aesthetical moment of contemplation the individual as such comes to be abolished. It has always been the essence of all painting to materialize in colour and line the universal, that comes to the foreground on that occasion.’[296] Painting therefore becomes a means to approach the structure of the universe. ‘Plastic vision is conscious contemplation, or rather: penetration. It means discrimination, seeing the truth. It leads to comparison and thereby to the vision of relationship, or to the vision of relationship and thereby to comparison. It means seeing things, as far as possible, objectively.’[297]

The painters of ‘De Stijl’ consider the universal force as the only essential reality, which they attempt to discover again and again: ‘We must see deeper, we must see abstractly and first of all, universally(.....). Then, exterior reality will become to us what it really is: a reflection of the truth.’[298] The manifestation of this truth should be the aim of all human activity, and painting, in this respect, is in a privileged position. ‘And thus, the base of all life, of religion, science and art, is the striving for a clear vision of the universal.’[299] In the dialogue on neo-plasticism, the painter answers the objection that all things in abstract composition would become alike with the following remark: ‘If it is one's intention to manifest what things have in common and not what makes them differ, this is not a drawback, but a necessity. For the particular, which leads us away from the principal, is abolished by this procedure; the common factor remains. The expression of things gives place to the pure expression of relation.’[300]

The universal force was to be the most important feature in man's vision of

reality. All the domains of spiritual activity tended to emphasize it and in the immediate past had shown the first realizations: ‘Distinctness, clarity, are claims of life and art. Philosophically, distinctness is created by knowledge; though only the highest knowledge interprets the universal. Aesthetically distinctness is manifested by pure plastic vision. Religiously it is faith in the sense of direct contemplation.’[301] Modern painting had gradually come to realize this manifestation of the universal: ‘Modern painting has shown, in general, a consistent striving towards liberation from the individual (with increasing consistency and then accelerated speed); it has come (in neo-plasticism) to a clear expression of the universal; doing so, it is a manifestation of the present - even though it is ahead of its time.’[302] By this conception the painters of ‘De Stijl’, and Mondriaan in the first place, arrive at an evaluation of their own period as being one of spiritual revolution: ‘Therefore this period is to be considered as the great turning point where humanity no longer tends from the individual towards the universal, but from the universal towards the individual, in order to realize it universally - for the individual becomes but truly real indeed, when it has been transposed into the universal.’[303] The fact that their era is considered as a turning point, brings about an additional opposition to tradition, and for this reason Vantongerloo writes: ‘The new artist thus has to part with tradition and become conscious of universality: of the union of spirit and matter.’[304]

What then, is the universal force hitherto undiscovered and only indirectly expressed by plastic art? It is about the same as the ‘universalia’ of Mediaeval scholastic thought, as the ‘substantia’ of Aristotelean tradition. But it is at the same time energy in the modern sense of the word, as it has been discovered and described by physical science. Painting has proved to be one of the few means of revealing this universal force, the unity of all creation; thus it is painting's task to attempt its manifestation: ‘The exact expression of unity can therefore be manifested, it must be manifested, as it is not apparent in visible reality.’[305] This is painting's obligation in regard to its content.

Van Doesburg, whose theoretical argumentation is much less speculative and more concerned with its point of departure, gives an example of the transposition of nature into its universal pattern when stating: ‘That the artist - that is a man who feels a need for communication - is not concerned with the bird or even with the bird's song, but only with the state of mind which has been wrought in him. This is his subject: there is no other. This is not new. But the way in which he embodies this state of mind is. If he is a painter, he will choose the colours and forms by which this state becomes evident. He arranges, multiplies, measures and defines the conformity, the relations, and the results of colour and form in relation to his emotion. This emotion and the inexhaustible source of pictorial means are the only things with which the painter is concerned. Nowhere is there room for the bird... the bird only exists in regard to his emotion; it is not the outward perception of the bird, which moves him, but its content, the universe.’[306] This conception of a painting's content leads, of necessity, to the abstraction which Van Doesburg describes in the course of

his article: ‘The artist seeks the common in the particular. To find beauty is nothing more than to discover the general. This common is the divine. Ta recognise the divine in a work of art means to be moved aesthetically. A work could be made from straight and horizontal lines only (.....), which could reveal the divine in the shortest time and in the most direct way.’[307]

Mondriaan endeavours to express the same thought, when he writes ‘In the instability of relations, there is one unchangeable relation: it is manifested plastically by the rectangular position which gives us a plastic hold.’[308] And he expounds a similar argument as Van Doesburg's, only more speculatively, about the relation of abstraction and the appearance of life: ‘Pure plastic manifestation is not a reproduction of life. It is its opposite. It is the unchangeable, absolute, in opposition to the capricious, the changeable. The absolute is expressed by the straight line. Painting and architecture, according to the new aesthetics, are the consistent realization of a composition of straight lines in neutralising opposition and therefore a multitude of the duality of the unchangeable rectangular position.’[309] The universal force reigns in all the fields of nature and Mondriaan stresses the fact that for him and ‘De Stijl’ artists it is more than a conception of reality; it is reality itself. These lines have the deep and convincing accent of a confession: ‘For the new man of today, the universe is not a vague idea, but living reality, which expresses itself plastically in a visual and audible way. Aware of the impossibility of expressing “the inner essence of existent things”, as this inner essence is pure abstraction, beyond every possibility of plastic representation, man perceives the universal in its appearance within the individual, as it only becomes apparent when tied to the individual. The false conviction of being able to express the essence of existing things by plastic representation has forced painting into symbolism and romanticism, into a passion for “description”. The realists are quite right: only by “reality” everything is revealed. It is therefore the appearance of reality that matters. Neo-plasticism demands a reality which expresses the objects in their totality and as a unity, as an equilibrated, neutralised duality. This excludes any appearance of palpable reality and any expression in which the individual prevails. The objects and things are brought into a universal means of plastic expression, which expresses things without having the pretension of representing them. This new reality is in painting, a composition of colours and non-colours, in music a composition of tones and definite sounds. In this way, subject-matter does not hamper the precision of composition. Composition becomes reality. The result, as a whole, is a complement to nature, which only supplies the exterior appearance.’[310]

The universal force is the subject of all neo-plasticist painting; and by this subject, all subject-matter falls into disuse. In the age of ‘De Stijl’ it is the task of art to express this universal force as objectively as possible and to demolish all obstacles which may stand in the way of objective expression: ‘Even the most perfect, the most general forms, the geometrical forms, have expression of their own. It is the task of art, the aim of all movement towards style, to abolish this distinct (individual) expression.’[311] At the end of this pro-

cess of evolution, an objective expression of art's content, of the universal, will be attained: 'In spite of all differences, all art, by the progressing culture of the spirit, will become more and more a definite manifestation of equilibrated relations; as equilibrated relations most purely express the universal, harmony and unity, which are the properties of the spirit (.....). If we concentrate on equilibrated relations, we shall therefore be able to see unity in nature.'[312]

Mondriaan again and again stresses the fact that universal vision has become possible by the innovations of his period, but that it has not been sufficiently revealed to human society. The objective expression of universal reality has a long tradition but it only found its direct realization in the beginning of the 20th Century: 'Objective vision - as far as possible - is the principal claim of all plastic art. If objective vision were possible, it would give us a true image of reaiity. For centuries our vision has been increasingly enlarged through the development of life, science and technology. Consequently, it has become possible to see more objectively. However, intuitively plastic art has always aimed at the universal expression of reality.'[313]

Even during the second world war Mondriaan stresses the necessity of universal vision and of its expression in painting and it is moving to hear how he clings to his vision of equilibrium and harmony amidst the chaos of the second war he experiences: 'In our present mechanised world where the opposing factors of life are so strongly accentuated, that only combat can bring a solution, it is illogical to attempt to experience reality through fantastic feelings. At the moment there is no need for art to create a reality of imagination, based on appearances, events or traditions. Art should not follow the intuitions relative to our life in time but only those intuitions relating to true reality. Even in this chaotic moment we can near equilibrium through the realization of a true vision of reality. Modern life and culture helps us in this. Science and technical knowledge are abolishing the oppression of time.'[314] In all his later essays he opposes this universal vision, which is only concerned with the fundamental essence of things, to another vision, which takes an active interest in accidental forms, events and appearances: 'Although art is fundamentally everywhere and always the same, nevertheless two main human inclinations, diametrically opposed to each other, appear in its many and varied expressions. One aims at the direct creation of universal beauty, the other at the aesthetic expression of oneself, in other words, of that which one thinks and experiences. The first aims at representing reality objectively, the second subjectively.'[315] And at another time: 'Subjective reality and relative objective reality: this is the contrast. Pure abstract art aims at creating the latter, figurative art the former.'[316] And he goes so far as to consider every particular sensation an interference with universal vision and its harmony. 'It must be obvious, that if one evokes in the spectator the sensation of say, the sunlight or moonlight, of joy or sadness, or any other determined sensation, one has not succeeded in establishing universal beauty, one is not purely abstract.'[317] But, on the other hand, the universal vision embraces all these determined sensations, they are all included in its equilibrium. Therefore

Mondriaan can write: ‘So we see neo-plasticism not as a denial of full life: we see it as a reconciliation of the duality of mind and matter.’[318]

Indeed, the artists of ‘De Stijl’ oppose their vision of reality to the traditional one, as harmony is opposed to chaos. A passage from an article by Van Eesteren casts a clear light on this conception: ‘For those who might feel afraid of such abstract beauty, it may be remarked that our nature is capable of recognizing perfection but that it can only temporarily realize it. Thus chaos or the imperfect, amidst which we often feel amazingly well, has been saved. Nevertheless we all strive for perfection and only that which approaches perfection most closely is really beautiful.’[319] Perfection is not to be found in nature and it is the task of the artist to reveal it by this universal vision. For Mondriaan, perfection is the ultimate aim as he knows that perfection cannot be found anywhere: ‘Though the universal is manifested by nature as the absolute, the absolute does only occur in nature hidden and veiled by natural colour and form. Though the universal manifests itself as the absolute, in line by straight line, in colour by the plane and the purity, and in relation by the equilibrated, it only reveals itself in nature as the tendency towards the absolute...’[320]

From this conception of a universal force, which can be manifested by art, Van Doesburg draws the conclusion, when formulating the aims of ‘De Stijl’: ‘Modern art is the direct mediator between man and the absolute. The modern artist abolishes the illusions of delusive relations. His aesthetic conscience only reacts on what is above the relative, on the universal. By the abolition of the illusion of delusive relations in the individual, in nature, he brings to the light the elementary plastic relations to which the world is subjected.’[321] And he characterizes this tendency of modern art as the basis of a new conception of culture: ‘How should this unity of style become apparent, if the development of art in general had not forced the artist to employ the general forms and relations, which nature hides for Visual recognition behind a veil of caprice, as the building material for their art. As a building material it is a means, not an aim (.....). The forms of the old culture decay, because the essence of a new culture is already intrinsically extant in humanity.’[322]

The universal force is thus the only content of ‘De Stijl's’ creations and its manifestation is the task of its artists. It is an exclusive task, as the universal force cannot be manifested directly by words, for words still are bound to carry a particular significance: ‘The aim of art - plastic art, music and especially painting - is to express the idea of creation according to its specific ways, by its special means. It therefore stands to reason that the idea of creation or the aesthetical moment cannot be absolutely described. (.....) Rather, it is the task of the artist to materialise all the accents of the aesthetic idea. It is the essential value of the plastic work, that these accents become visible, audible and tangible, that is to say concretely apparent to us.’[323]

Therefore ‘De Stijl’ is not only ta be considered as a new trend in painting, as a formalist or aesthetic movement, but as the plastic manifestation of a new and yet very old conception of life: universalism. None of ‘De Stijl’ artists has stressed this fact as explicitly as Van Doesburg has done: ‘The painters of this

group, wrongly called "abstractionists" do not have a preference for a certain subject, knowing well enough that the painter has his subject within himself: plastic relations. For the true painter, the painter of relations, this fact contains his entire conception of the world. That is why he can do without any subject-matter (in the usual sense).'[324]

It would therefore be a mistake to consider 'De Stijl' exclusively from the point of view of art history, that is to say as a consistent development of the life of forms. Its content is as important as the form it has logically given it. 'De Stijl' thus aims at establishing and manifesting a new conception of the Cosmos. As so many movements in the early 20th Century - anthroposophy, theosophy, the revival of the rosicrucian movement - it attempted to exceed the limitations of time and space and to attain a notion of the structure of the universe. Every period makes its efforts to create an image of the Cosmos; to write or to paint its own cosmogony. It is not surprising that the 20th century in doing so, has found its symbols in the field of mathematical abstraction. 'De Stijl's' desire to manifest this cosmic force has been quite explicitly expressed: 'Thus it interprets in a stronger way the cosmic rhythm, which flows through all things.'[325] It is Mondriaan who thus formulates 'De Stijl's' desire and Van Doesburg finds another definition: Here representation (imitation) comes to an end; here begins the aesthetical transformation (rendering) into another reality that is deeper than the particular one: a cosmic reality.[326] And in his essay of 1930 Mondriaan once more hints at the infinite expanding value of his subject: 'That which art conveys and makes us see and feel by this purely plastic expression is difficult to determine. Byit, art expresses beauty, truth,goodness, grandeur and richness - the universe, man, nature.'[327] The root of this sweeping statement may already be found in Mondriaan's article in the first number of *De Stijl*: 'The truly modern artist consciously discerns this emotion of beauty as being cosmic, universal.'[328] And in the same number of *De Stijl* Van der Leck, whose few articles are of a great importance and clarity, emphasizes the same conception: 'This is the positive result of modern painting's destructive character: that it pursues the representation of visual reality with its tragic accents, to cosmic values of space, light and relations, in which all earthly plasticism, or "the case" is contained and presupposed.'[329]

Before this vast conception of the universe, the individual emotion has to be silenced. 'De Stijl's' universal conception is, more than anything else, the reason for its anti-individualistic tendency. Mondriaan in his later essays expresses this feeling: 'It must be emphasized however, that art is expressed through universal emotion and is not an expression of individual emotion. It is an aesthetic expression of reality and of men realized by universal perception.'[330] And elsewhere, but in a very similar way: 'In order to express universal reality, traditional conception starts from individual limiting forms; modern conception starts from the perception of universal reality. The form becomes really a "meeans".'[331] The first quotation regards the individual properties of the subject, the second those of the object; in both cases, the individual aspect is considered as an interference with universal reality. Both forms of prevailing individualism

can be abolished by conscious perception of human situation in the universe: 'Only conscious man can be a pure mirror of the universal; he is capable of being consciously one with the universal and thereby rising consciously above the individual.'[332]

Van Doesburg, in his defence of an essentially objective and serene art, goes even further; he rejects all forms of emotion, as being contradictory to universal equilibrium. 'The spiritual, the completely abstract, expresses the human essence with precision, whereas sensitivity does not even reach the level of the intellectual qualities and must therefore be considered as belonging to a lower degree of human culture. Art should not move the heart. Every emotion, be it grief or joy, implies a rupture of harmony, of equilibrium between the subject (man) and the object (universe). The work of art should create a state of equilibrium between it and the universe; sentimental emotions do create exactly the opposite state. They are the consequence of a confused, inadequate conception of life, which is a result of our individualism, of our attachment to nature. All sentimental emotions should be reduced to pure proportions of space.'[333]

Similar ideas can be found with all of 'De Stijl' artists, as the universalist conception is an essential property of 'De Stijl'. Oud has formulated this idea in the first volume of *De Stijl*: 'Paradoxically speaking one could say that the struggle of the modern artist is a struggle against sentiment. The modern artist aims at the general, whereas sentiment (subjective vision) leads towards the particular. The subjective is the arbitrary, the unconscious, the relatively indefinite, that can be sublimated, by consciousness, to relative distinctness. To this end, the subjective is to be regulated and organised by consciousness, so that it may lead to style by its relative distinctness. This organising and establishing of distinctness is the aim of modern art.'[334]

By the preceding quotations, 'De Stijl's' aversion to emotion and individualism has become clear; it results from a universalist conception which has brought 'De Stijl' in opposition to all artistic tendencies which base themselves on the emotional approach to reality. 'De Stijl's' approach to reality is quite different; while it aims at an objective view of the universal force, it has to exclude all casual aspects of its object as well as every influence of the subject, which could interfere with the validity of the result. The aim of 'De Stijl' in its search for objective reality is truth; and as it aims at truth and not at sincerity, its method of approach has to be strictly objective, that is to say, as exact as the methods of science or logies. 'De Stijl', in its attempt to present an objective manifestation of the universal force, has done away with the traditional 'licentia poetae' and has established a method that should equal science and abstract philosophy in its objectivity. In the *Manifeste of concrete art* Van Doesburg in 1930 writes: 'The predominance of individualism, as well as the predominance of the local genius, have always been a great obstacle to the birth of a universal art'[335] and he continues: 'The work of art is not created by the fingers nor by the nerves. Emotion, sentiment, sensibility, have never helped art on towards perfection. Only thought (intellect) creates, at a speed unquestionably higher

than that of light (.....). The evolution of painting is nothing else but an intellectual research into truth by optical culture.'[336]

Thus painting is placed similar to logies or science, or to any other intellectuel research; for painting is concernd with objective laws, which have to be established and cannot be established but by means of reason. Van Doesburg had already hinted at this conception as early as in 1918, in the first volume of *De Stijl:* 'The plastic laws of art are at the same time the fundamental laws of nature. Thus in pure plastic realization the essence (the universal harmony) and not the outward aspect of nature comes to complete expression in the artistic phenomenon.'[337]

Art and science follow parallel roads - this fact, hitherto not admitted, is stressed by 'De Stijl'. Vantongerloo formulates it as follows: 'Science and art have the same laws'[338] and in his book *Art and its future:* 'I do not therefore intend to say that art is nothing but the science of plastics. But it is inevitable to know this science in order to create a work of art. It is indeed impossible to manifest unity by a composition which is not subject to the plastic laws.'[339] He then describes his research, which led him to the discovery of some of these laws: 'The spectral analysis of the absolute shows us different successive and well characterised manifestations: sound, warmth, light or colours, chemical rays are, to different degrees, manifestations of the spectrum of the absolute.'[340] And in his article in the first volume of *De Stijl*, he ventures on a similar analysis of reality: 'The invisible in creation becomes visible for our spirit and the visible part of creation shows us the invisible. The visible and the invisible together constitute harmony or the laws of unity. They are based on these laws and therefore proclaim the glory of creation (.....). These are the laws of nature and he who desires to create must obey them.'[341]

Vantongerloo considers the plastic laws equal to the laws of science; Van Doesburg and Mondriaan compare them to the laws of abstract philosophy, of logics. Van Doesburg: 'As we try to understand these relations by reason, we try to contemplate these same relations by way of beauty, that is to say, by art.'[342] And Mondriaan: 'Pure plastic vision leads to the notion of construction, which is the foundation of everything existing.'[343] And elsewhere: 'Neo-plasticism has found the new reality in painting, by abstracting the outward superficial appearance and only expressing (crystalizing) the inward essence. It has established new reality by the composition of rectangular planes of colour and non-colour, which take the place of representation of limited forms. This universal means of expression makes it possible to give the exact expression of a great eternal lawfulness in relation to which the objects and all existence are only its indistinct embodiments. Neo-plasticism gives expression to this law-fulness, to this 'unchangeable' by an exact, distinct, i.e. a rectangular relation.'[344] In his *Bauhausbuch* Mondriaan stresses the parallelism between philosophy and art: 'Philosophy as well as art manifest the universal; the first as truth, the latter as beauty (.....). Some progressive spirits entirely reject logies. Does that mean liberating art? Is not art the visible materialisation of logics?'[345] And this trend of ideas is once more resumed in his later essays, when he writes: 'Abstract art is

in opposition to the natural vision of nature. But it is in accordance with the plastic laws which are more or less veiled in the natural aspect. These laws determine the establishment of equilibrium, opposition, proportion, division, relationship, etc.'[346]

The artists of 'De Stijl' were deeply concerned with the universal force and with its laws. As they intended to establish and to materialize these laws, it is not surprising that they felt, above all, attracted by mathematics. Mathematics had already developed a method, permitting man to penetrate the laws of the universe, to understand the activity of cosmic motion. It is again Vantongerloo who emphasizes the parallelism between these two methods of approaching the universe: 'Philosophy talks about a point, a line, a plane, a volume, about light, colour, in order to demonstrate the universe. The man of science uses these means in order to show the force of universe. The artist employs the same means, in order to show the splendour of the universe. Philosophy, science, and art strive for unity by means of evolution'.[347] And more specifically about mathematics: 'As mathematics are the clearest means by which to understand things objectively, art is the most proper way to feel things aesthetically.'[348]

But this notion is not only proposed by Vantongerloo; Mondriaan as well as the other artists of 'De Stijl' are in complete agreement: 'By painting in itself the artist became aware that the appearance of the universal, cast in its mathematical form is the essence of all pure aesthetically plastic emotion of beauty'[349] and in the same context: 'It is precisely by the culture offormal expression that one has come to see that the abstract - the mathematical - manifests itself by and in all objects, though it does so indistinctly - in other words: modern painting by itself came to the distinct manifestation of the universal, which reveals itself from out of its veils, in and by the natural appearance of things.'[350] Mathematical abstractions - the straight line, the right angle - thus appear in the works of 'De Stijl' not for their own sake, but as they are the most proper means of manifesting the universal force. This may well be the reason why the famous passage from Plato's Philebos (section 51 c), which is so often used in the defence of abstract art and which was certainly known to Van Doesburg, does not occur in *De Stijl*. On the other hand, two other quotations may be found which give a clear indication of the relation of the abstract means of expression to the universal content of 'De Stijl's' works: One is quoted from St. Augustine: 'The number is all in art',[351] the other, even clearer, from *Ecclesiastes*: 'Omnia in mesura et numere et pondere disposuisti.'[352]

The laws of the universe, their definite establishment, the knowledge of the abstract method of expression - all these factors lead the artists of 'De Stijl' to their goal of a definite manifestation of the universal rhythm. In their works, this rhythm is to appear as harmony, as equilibrium, as an adequate reflection of universal harmony. The manifestation of this harmony is the aim and the content of all 'De Stijl's' works. Van Doesburg has given a definition of this aim in his lecture, which has been reprinted in a German translation in his *Bauhausbuch:* 'Though we are not capable of seizing perfect harmony, the absolute equilibrium of the universe, everything in the universe, every object is

nevertheless subordinate to the laws of this harmony, this equilibrium. It is the artist's task to trace this hidden harmony, this universal equilibrium, in all things and to express it, to show its lawfulness, etc. The (truly exact) work of art is a comparison of the universe, by artistic means.'[353] This is one of the most revealing texts in De Stijl's early history, since it shows quite clearly the intimate relation of the artistic results with their universalist content. The universalist conception of 'De Stijl' - too often neglected by historians on behalf of purely aesthetic aims - is the more essential as it is the common property of all the artists of 'De Stijl' and their principal tenet.

To Vantongerloo, equilibrium is the aim of the universe: 'Since its first movement, lost in the infinite, nature seeks its equilibrium'[354] and therefore equilibrium or harmony, is to be the principal aim of art as well. Mondriaan emphasizes, in many of his articles, that harmony is the essence and the aim of art: 'The essence of art is the plastic expression of - indescribable - life in all its fullness and richness. Its deepest consciousness has at all times been called "hamony". Harmony has always been set forth as the first demand of art. It is achieved by the equilibrium of relations of line, colour and form.'[355] In his trialogue he gives an example, as to the way in which harmony may be approached in nature: 'Night - the stars in a clear sky above a wide sandy plain - (.....). We see now that there is another reality than the petty human commotion. We see clearly its insignifiance; all seclusion has ceased to exist. We see unity and set against the instability of human ambitions we contemplate the unchangeable.'[356] But nature and its relative harmony are only a point of departure for the artist's vision. Once he has acquired the sense of harmony, he can do without the motive: 'But finally the artist no longer needs a definite natural fact in order to arrive at an image of beauty. As the universal becomes more active within him, because the individual has lost its dominating influence, he expresses equilibrated relations - perfect harmony, i.e. the aim of art - by his increased consciousness. He has lodged exterior reality in himself - therefore it is still in him, in order to move him.'[357]

By this evolution of aesthetic capacities 'De Stijl's' art comes to maturity; the artist has learnt the laws of harmony from nature, but once they are in his possession, he is free to dismiss the objects he has learnt from; he may now handle the laws by their own right. Thus abstraction is turned into free creation. 'However, in new art the laws of harmony no longer realize themselves in the way of nature; they appear more independently than they are visually revealed in nature.'[358] This evolution towards a contemplation of the universal laws, independently from nature, does not only regard the artist; the spectator is to be concerned with it as well: 'Though the order in nature is not immediately apparent, at least not to the untrained eye, nevertheless it is this equilibrated order which causes the deepest emotion of harmony in the spectator(.....). As the spectator has come to a definite consciousness of the cosmic harmony, he - that is, the artistic temperament - will long for the pure manifestation of harmony and for the pure manifestation of equilibrated relations.'[359]

Thus the universal force and harmony in art are two manifestations of the

same principle. Van Doesburg stresses this fact by writing: ‘Pure intuition, that is the clear vision or experience of the universal, which is beauty, must manifest itself directly.’[360] Harmony is the aim and the content of ‘De Stijl's’ art: ‘Unity, harmony (not naturalistic, but aesthetical) is the subject of painting and of art in general.’[361] It is Mondriaan, as we have seen before, who had claimed the development of art towards harmony as the principle of artistic evolution and who characterizes harmony as having always been the essential in art: ‘In all times the painter sees one and the same thing in and through all things: though his vision changes, it is always the one beauty which moves him in and by all things. This unique beauty is the opposition of what makes things to be things: it is the universal which appears to us by way of things. Consciously or unconsciously the painter tries to manifest this different side of what he visually sees - that is the reason why a work of art is so different from nature.’[362]

The universe, as we have seen, is ‘De Stijl's’ content, its subject. We have seen that abstract means have been claimed for the manifestation of this force, in a parallel to science, to logics and mathematics. The artists of ‘De Stijl’ formulate this claim quite explicitly: ‘To realize spirituality, a spiritual form is needed; thus an abstract form (.....). Spirituality is universal, as it has no limit. Therefore a universal form is needed to obtain in unity an equilibrium with spirituality.’[363] Next to Vantongerloo, Mondriaan develops a similar argument: ‘If indeed the appropriate elaboration of the expressive means and their use, that is composition, is the only pure expression of art, then the means of expression are to be in complete conformity with what they have to express. If they are to be the direct expression of the universal, then they cannot but be universal, that is to say, abstract.’[364] By these means of expression, an appropriate, a real manifestation of the universal can be brought about. ‘Neo-plasticism might as well bear the name of abstract-real painting, as the abstract (as in mathematics, but without reaching the absolute) can be expressed by plastic reality’[365] and elsewhere: ‘Let us rather call it real art, though this may bring confusion to the existing conception of “real”. For ancient art has only apparently been real, it rendered reality (the ego and the non-ego) not as it is, it only gave an illusion, or part of it. It did not manifest reality in its whole, not purely.’[366] As abstract-real art, ‘De Stijl's’ artists' work stands between reality and the absolute and they lead the way towards the universal aim: ‘It is not as abstract as an intellectual abstraction and not as real as tangible reality,’[367] for in ‘De Stijl's’ conception, harmony indeed lives in both these realms. But it can only be realized by abstraction, as Kok writes: ‘Essentially plastic beauty can only be expressed through the abstract, through the spiritual.’[368]

There is still one point in ‘De Stijl's’ conception of the universe, which needs further comment. As an early 20th century conception, ‘De Stijl's’ ideas on the universe were based on contemporary science; they therefore dealt with universal forces and not with bodies. ‘De Stijl's’ conception of harmony therefore means a dynamic equilibrium of forces, and not a stable balance of bodies. This conception becomes apparent in pictorial composition: harmony is at-

tained by ‘equilibrated relations’ of lines (which after all are only ‘directions’) and pure colours, that is by the relation of forces of colour and line and no more by the counterweight of forms and bodies. The equilibrium in ‘De Stijl's’ composition is essentially dynamic, or, in other words, dialectic. Several quotations may help to emphasize this side of the problem. Mondriaan hints at this question in the first annual of *De Stijl:* ‘Art - one of the revelations of truth - has always expressed the truth of opposition, but has only realized it creatively in this era. We have to acknowledge the division between old and new painting, as soon as we understand that natural painting only manifested this truth in a veiled and unbalanced way, whereas neo-plasticism manifests it definitely and in equilibrium.’[369] Another instance: ‘At present, painting reaches what has always been its essence, but what had not been materialized: the plastic realisation of the unity of reciprocal action of oppositions.’[370] Van Doesburg too, formulates his conception of dialectic polarity: ‘The struggle which is based in the structure of life is a struggle of two opposing forces. We could call them nature and spirit, the male and the female principle, negative and positive, static and dynamic, horizontal and vertical - they are the unchangeable forces, on which the contradiction of our life is based and which appear in instability. The abrogation of this struggle, the neutralisation of the extremes, the abolition of polarity is the content of life and the elementary subject of art.’[371] Equilibrium is therefore the synthesis of opposing forces and it is the essential task of art to achieve this synthesis by plastic means: ‘For neither the new plastic means nor the pure relations are the essence of the plastic expression of art. The essential is the equilibrium that can be reached by these means.’[372] Or, as Van Doesburg terms it: ‘We have to perceive the essence of plastic conception in the notion of neutralisation. Neutralisation of the one by the other.’[373]

This striving for dynamic dialectics was the reason for Van Doesburg's creation of elementarism, which resulted in the schism of ‘De Stijl’. Mondriaan wrote in 1924: ‘Symmetry marks things as being separated; therefore the expression of the universal for the sake of the universal excludes symmetry. Abstract-real expression is to re-model it into equilibrium, proceding by the constant opposing of position and measure, by the manifestation of relation, which changes one into the other.’[374] Van Doesburg explains contra-composition, the more dynamic form of neo-plasticism as follows: ‘In contra-composition, equilibrium in the plane plays a less important part. Each plane is part of peripheric space and construction has to be more conceived as a phenomenon of tension than as one of relations in the plane.’[375] But in his later work, especially in his American period, Mondriaan also has stressed the primary importance of dialectic dynamism: ‘Abstract art emphasizes the fact that in plastic art the expression of reality cannot be similar to that of palpable reality. The dynamic movement established by the opposition of forms and their colours constitutes the expression of universal reality’[376]; and even more clearly: ‘First and foremost there is the fundamental law of dynamic equilibrium, which is opposed to the static equilibrium necessitated by particular form. The im-

portant task then, of all art, is to destroy the static equilibrium by establishing a dynamic one.'[377]

In the preceding pages, we have examined the content of 'De Stijl's' work. We have seen that it aimed at the manifestation of universal reality and that it adhered to the old scholastic axioma 'universalia sunt realia'. In agreement with the universalist trend of philosophy and in opposition to nominalist tendencies, it denied the essential value of individual appearance. We have seen how 'De Stijl' adapted its means to the realization of its aim and how equilibrium in painting became an expression of universal harmony. We have tried to demonstrate that this equilibrium is of a different nature than this harmony had been in preceding trends of painting, that it is characterized by its dynamic dialectic properties. We have attempted to show, that 'De Stijl's' conception of universal reality was to result, in art, in the creation of universal beauty, or universal harmony. We may be permitted to quote once again frorn Mondriaan's writings: 'In life, sometimes the spirit has been over-emphasized at the expense of the body, sometimes one has been preoccupied with the body and neglected the spirit. Similarly in art content and form have alternately been over-emphasized or neglected because their inseparable unity was not fully realized. To create this unity in art, balance of one and the other must be created. It is an achievement of our time to have approached towards such balance in a field in which disequilibrium still reigns. Disequilibrium means conflict, disorder. Conflict is also part of life and of art, but it is not the whole of life or universal beauty. Real life is the mutual interaction of two oppositions of the same value, but different aspect and nature. Its plastic expression is universal beauty.'[378]

In a later essay Mondriaan emphasizes the importance of this realization of equilibrium for humanity: The clarification of equilibrium through plastic art is of great importance for humanity. It reveals that although human life in time is doomed to disequilibrium, notwithstanding this it is based on equilibrium. It demonstrates that equilibrium can become more and more living in us. Reality only appears to us tragical because of the disequilibrium and confusion of its appearances.[379]

Here, the relation of 'De Stijl's' aesthetic ambitions with the moral and social structure of humanity is touched upon. As we have seen that 'De Stijl's' aesthetical innovations are in intimate relation to its conception of the world and of life, this problem should be examined in the following pages. It is slightly linked up with 'De Stijl's' conception of accidental and universal reality, with its ambition to reduce everything to the absolute. And when reading the sentences which Mondriaan puts into the mouth of his opponent in the trialogue, we already hold the key of this problem: 'The beauty of nature does not satisfy me entirely - I cannot enjoy a beautiful summer evening, for instance. Perhaps then I feel, in a manner of speaking, how everything ought to be, while at the same time I am aware of my own impotence to make it so in my life.'[380] 'De Stijl's' striving for perfection, for equilibrium and order is not limited to art; on the contrary, it aims at life as a whole.

Art and life - The Utopian prospect

The manifestation of the universal force, as we have seen in the preceding pages, was ‘De Stijl's’ content. The realization of equilibrium, a consequence of the former, was the aim. We have seen that to the artists of ‘De Stijl’ a work of art was a ‘comparison of the universe’, that in a work of art the forces and Iaws of the universe should be revealed and made visible to the beholder. These aspects of ‘De Stijl's’ art have already pointed to the fact that ‘De Stijl's’ art exceeded the narrow boundaries of a ‘l'art pour l'art’ conception, that truly ‘De Stijl's’ work was to fulfill a mission towards humanity and towards life. Not in the traditional sense though, that art should be tied to a part of human activity or to a stratum of human society in order to propagate its aims: ‘De Stijl’ refused to be the ‘ancilla’ of any one or anything at all, with as the only exception, The universal force. To serve this very essence of life and universe, ‘De Stijl’ was not only willing but it considered itself well-prepared.

It is a fact of great importance, that ‘De Stijl’ - very much the offspring of ‘l'art pour l'art’ - had engaged itself with the problem of the relationship of art and life and that it did no longer consider art as a state of complete freedom, endowed with privileges, but without any responsibility. ‘De Stijl’ however, approached the question of art's relation to life from a different point of view than the usual one. Its starting point, in this matter as well as in others, is its conception of universal unity, of art essential homogeneity of art, life and the universe: ‘(Abstract-real art) produces a process of life, which is reflected in artistic expression. In general, man considers a work of art too much as an article of luxury, as something pleasant, even as a decoration, as something besides life. But art and life are one: art and life are both expressions of truth.’[381]

From this point of view a subordination of art under part of life's activities is impossible and art, in its turn, is concerned with the manifestation of life as a whole. Consequently, the works of ‘De Stij’ appeal to man as a whole and not only to his religious or mythological or historical interest: the aesthetic interest which they evoke, embraces all these particular aspects of human interest. ‘The evolution of the individual continues towards its “completion”. In “complete man” the individual features are resolved in the individual, he is capable of seeing and hearing universally. The consciousness he has attained will alvvays demand distinction. Thus the need for a distinct manifestation of the universal comes into existence.’[382] But the artists of ‘De Stijl’ are well aware that man is still far from being the ‘complete man’, that universal perception is still a postulats ideal and not yet a fact: ‘Only when the new spirit of time appears more generally, neo-plasticism will become a generally felt need. Only then the factors are all present for it to cuIminate.’[383] But in the meantime ‘De Stijl's’ conception of art cannot betray its source, it remains faithful to its universal inspiration, not-withstanding the fact that there will be little resonance for the striving and its results: ‘When the new consciousness of life reaches distinctness in art in a time in which this consciousness of life is still slumbering in the masses, and there-

fore cannot become an attitude of life - then artistic expression is ahead of time and stands alone, at least it seems to do so. It does not adapt itseif to life. On the contrary.'[384] This divergence between the actual conditions of life and 'De Stijl's' uncompromising ambition towards universal vision accounts for 'De Stijl's' innovating force in regard to its surroundings - it accounts as well for the Utopian tendency which will be reviewed in the following pages.

Mondriaan, who revered the universal with an almost religious fervour is - by this fact - the champion of the Utopian tendency of 'De Stijl's' ambitions towards life. His exclusive concentration on the universal left but little room for a direct engagement in his actual surroundings. The marvelous perfectionism, which made him devote months on the ultimate completion of his paintings, did not encourage him to spend his energy on superficial improvements of life in fields, in which he felt a somewhat timid stranger. But though he did not concern himself with incidental improvements, he devoted much of his thought and his energy to the solution of the problem which was essential to him: the future development of art and life towards the aim, that universal vision had revealed to him.

This aim was universal harmony; to be realized in art, but in life as well. In art and in life, it means the reign of serene, unchangeable equilibrium. A state of mind which excludes sorrow as well as enthousiasm, which is everlasting certainty. It is indeed the undisturbed ecstasy of the 'unio mystica' and Mondriaan finds words of a religious glow to describe it: 'As the immovable, equilibrium stands above all grief and all happiness. By our immovable, we resolve with all things. The changeable disturbs our equilibrium, it divides and separates us from everything that is different from ourselves. From this equilibrium, from the unconscious and immovable, art arises.'[385] And Van Doesburg describes the same state of mind: 'The aesthetical moment is the instant, when we are - by art - in complete balance with ourselves and the world; the instant when opposing sentiments of desire and annoyance are neutralized'[386] and Mondriaan, when writingon colour: '...it is of principal importance that colour is free of the individual and of individual sensations, but that it only expresses the peaceful emotions of the universal.'[387]

For Mondriaan, the experience of equilibrium, of harmony, is essential: only by this emotion can man touch this perfection. 'In vital reality of abstraction, new man has surpassed the feelings of desire, of joy, of ravishment, of grief and of horror. In the constant emotion of beauty these feelings are purified and deepened. He attains a much deeper vision of sensible reality.'[388] Consequently, the establishment of equilibrium, which has been realized in art, should dominate the whole of human society. '...when all attention is concentrated upon the universal, the separate, the individual will disappear in artistic expression, as painting has shown. When the individual does no longer stand in the way, the universal can manifest itself purely. Only then the universal consciousness (intuition) - the origin of all art - can express itself and a pure artistic expression arise. But it does not rise before its time. The consciousness of time determines the artistic expression; the artistic expression reflects the consciousness of time.

Only the artistic expression which expresses today's - the coming - consciousness of time, is indeed really alive.'[389]

It is indeed a feature typical for 'De Stijl', that Mondriaan identifies today's consciousness of time with the future attitude towards life. It is a sign of his Utopian vision which concentrates on a future and better life, a life that has already attamed equilibrium.

But his optimistic belief already notes Symptoms of improvement in actual society. Indeed the development of 20th century life, the inventions of science and technique, are the base from which Mondriaan's Utopian vision rises; he sees progress in modern society and he only continues the line of progress towards an aim of perfection: 'But man, who develops in the direction of the balance of his duality, will create equivalent relations and therefore, equilibrium in an increasing degree. Social and economic life already today show his striving for exact balance. Material life will not always be threatened and doomed to tragedy, nor will our spiritual life beconstantly suppressed by the domination of material life.'[390]

Consequently, the realization of universal equilibrium amounts to the same thing as the abolition of the tragic and tragedy, by necessity, springs from natural reality: 'if we approach nature by natural, visual observation, a tragic vision is inevitable. Therefore a deeper vision is needed. Escape from tragic emotion is only for man, who has learned - by the development of pure plastic vision - to transpose the individual into the universal.'[391]

Mondriaan has experienced this tragic vision and the discussions about tragedy in his dialogue are drawn from his own experience which he describes as follows: 'I recognised that the equilibrium of any particular aspect of nature rests on the equivalence of its opposites. I felt that the tragic is created by unequivalence. I saw the tragic in a wide horizon or a high cathedral.'[392] The same trend of thought is expressed in a passage of his trialogue: 'X. The capricious is beautiful. Z. Beautiful, but tragic. When you keep following nature, you will only be able to abolish the tragic in your art to a small extent. Natural painting malces us feel the harmony which surpasses the tragic, but it does not express it distinctly, as it does not manifest equilibrated relations only. Natural appearance, form, natural colour, natural rhythm and even in most cases natural proportion, they all cannot but manifest tragedy. Y. When I compare this landscape with the preceding, where these capricious groups of trees were not visible, I do feel indeed, that capricious natural form does not express the great calm, about which you have been talking.'[393] Another passage from the same trialogue deals with the abolition of the tragic: 'Subjectively it is the domination of the natural within ourselves, objectively the domination of the natural without ourselves, that causes the tragic. - And this is only to be abolished by the growth of our entire being, of our interior and exterior, our nature and our spirit, by the way of speaking? - To abolish... we can reach even now a more equilibrated relationship of the one and the other, but it takes a very distant future to abolish the tragic within us, as well as the tragic governing our surroundings, entirely.'[394] In another article he says quite clearly: 'Only the pure appearance of the

elements (in equilibrated relations) can diminish tragedy in life and in art.'[395]

Neo-plasticism has indeed realized equilibrium and has abolished the tragic aspects in art. And Mondriaan defends it by this fact: 'As the abolition of the tragic is the aim of life, it is illogical to oppose neo-plasticism.'[396] And Kok expresses the same idea: 'The natural - beauty, ugliness - is always ried up with the tragic. But art is the spirit, it is emotion itself. It has nothing to do with the tragic. It is emotion by the contemplation of the eternal, the free, the universal, the spiritual.'[397] Though neo-plasticism has surpassed the domination of tragedy, its power and importance have not yet been sufficiently realized: In general one is not sufficiently aware that disequilibrium is a curse to humanity and people diligently continue to cultivate the feeling of the tragic.[397a] But tragedy is deeply rooted in our human behaviour: 'The relative, the changeable creates in us the desire for the absolute, the immovable (.....). As this is unattainable, we return to the relative and we attempt to make it permanent - impossible. Therefore, the immovable is once more sought, even by passing over the relative. Thus it has been in the course of centuries. The desire for the extreme causes the tragic in life (expressed in art by lyricism).'[398]

Indeed, tragedy is considered as a moving force, but universal vision has given man the means to bring its reign to an end: 'But we can escape the tragical oppression through a clear vision of true reality, which exists, but which is veiled. If we cannot free ourselves, we can free our vision.'[399] It has been the aim of 'De Stijl' to create this clear vision of universal reality and it can therefore be a help in abolishing the tragic: 'Art, being abstract and in opposition to the natural and concrete, can precede the graduai disappearance of the tragic. The more the tragic disappears, the more art gains in purity.'[400] The abolition of the tragic, by the creation of universal equilibrium, has been the achievement of 'De Stijl'; in painting at least, the domination of the tragic has been reduced to terms: 'Some time ago someone said: All art poses a question to fate, out of the desire for a better knowledge of itself; art is the last word of the human conscience. This is typicai for the old spirit. The new spirit on the contrary, is characterized by certainty, it does not question, it offers a solution. Human consciousness clearly rejects the unconscious, and expresses itself in art in such a way that - by creating equilibrium - it excludes every question. The domination of the tragic has ceased. Ancient painting has been an art of "the soul", therefore of the tragic; new painting is an art of the spirit, and therefore free from tragic domination.'[401] Tragedy and the equilibrium therefore exclude one another. The art of 'De Stijl' has been directed towards equilibrium - and it has succeeded in realizing it. By this fact, painting gains its great importance for life, for society; here the origin can be found for 'DeStijl's ' - and mainly for Mondriaan's - Utopian conception: 'Tragedy is only abolished by the creation of (final) unity; in external life this is far less possible than in abstract life. In art the unity of the one and the other can be realized abstractly: therefore art is ahead of life.'[402]

By these lines - and in others which will be quoted - the moral and social significance of 'De Stijl's' aim is expressed: painting, by creating equilibrium,

was the first to realize the laws of universal structure; it has given a demonstration of equilibrated relations and it should therefore be capable to serve as a paradigm for all the other sectors of human life which have not yet succeeded in realizing perfect balance. Owing to a lack of obstacles, it had been possible for painting to realize equilibrium: the other fields of human activity should profit from this advanced manifestation. 'Thus painting could realize in artistic expression what the new consciousness of time is still busy realizing in external life.'[403]

A new task has been created for art and especially for painting - and this fact is one of the most important achievements of 'De Stijl': to art the task was allotted to be society's vanguard in a hitherto undiscovered field. Never before in art history has the name of 'avant-garde' for an artistic movement been so full of meaning as for 'De Stijl'. It has been 'De Stijl's' intention to be a vanguard not only of the art of painting, but of human society as a whole. Mondriaan, in his study *Art and Life* of 1931, which is chiefly concerned with this problem, writes as follows: To our benefit, art has abstracted the rhythm of the contrasting oppositions of the straight line from the particular forms. For, being a universal representation of these forms, art makes us conceive that a more or less natural reality, after its having been transformed into a more universal aspect, still remains 'reality'.[404] By leading man towards a new vision of the world, neo-plasticism prepares a new society, a new and equilibrated order which is to be a reflection of the cosmic order and its laws: 'Pure plastic vision must build a new society, as it has built a new expression in art; a society of equivalent duality of mind and matter, a society of equilibrated relations.'[405] This conception of the constructive force of the universal idea leads to the Utopian imagination and the tenets of the future which Mondriaan has framed. Speculative as these Utopian conceptions may be, they are nevertheless of a great importance, as they do indeed indicate the way for the aesthetic development of humanity. It should not be forgotten that in the 18th and 19th century Utopian conceptions prepared the way for actual human progress and that, in the course of history many a Utopian act of faith has become reality. When Mondriaan writes on the liberation of man from the oppression of the subjective, he adds: 'This fact, proved to us by art, is of the utmost importance to life, because it tallies exactly with the basis of progress and indicates the way of it.'[406] On the other hand, it is symptomatic for the early 20th century - and perhaps even more for the Dutchmentality, that 'De Stijl's' or rather Mondriaan's Utopia is based on aesthetic thought, whereas all the preceding Utopian conceptions were built on moral, social or political principles: the flight from realities - which have proved disappointing - into the world of art is a symptomatic feature of the early century. But be that as it may, art has acquired a new function, and the artist has become again the seer, the path-finder for human society.

But it is not only Mondriaan, who sets this task for art: Van Doesburg too expresses this thought: 'Art is not a sham representation of nature. Nature is a question, art is the answer. The natural form has not yet got as far as the artistic

form. The artistic form has surpassed natural form. Art breeds another world.'[407] And even clearer, he considers art as a preconception of future reality: 'The plastic idea precedes the appearance and as this becomes apparent by itself at present, the essence of new culture becomes evident. In plastic art the new conception of culture has reached the state of its appearance. All other functions of human consciousness will only be able to develop if they keep the new plastic art in mind.'[408] And Huszar, as well, writes in *De Stijl*: 'We, the artists, can prepare equilibrium for society.'[409]

But it is indeed Mondriaan, who voices this Utopian creed and the consequent task of art, most clearly of all: 'Art is ahead of life; that which we are able to detect in present life is only the preludium to New Life. Therefore, let us observe the course of human culture in the free domain of art, to wit: its progressing towards the real liberation of any forms and the equivalence of their mutual relationship - towards a life of true equilibrium.'[410] Or, in the same context: 'It is only in man integrally human, i.e. in man on the pinnacle of human culture, that this balanced rhythm will be realized in the material and immaterial domain. Because of its being freer than life, art has already been able to manifest it.'[411]

Mondriaan's Utopian ideas are however, not vague at all but quite positive and precise: he knows what he is talking about. And he considers abstract life as a reality, which can already be found in the life of his own time. Abstract art is its consequence - but its means of realization as well: 'As abstract-real painting is the expression of abstract-real life, this life can reciprocally maintain itself by leaning on the truths which have been realized in this trend of painting.'[412] And more specifically: 'The culture of life has been anything but finished. In a very few works of art however, plastic art's culture has come to a terminus. This is the reason why this art is able to enlighten us.'[413]

There is, in his booklet *Art and Life* an impassioned passage which illustrated quite positively Mondriaan's vision on art's task. By these lines, it becomes clear that for him - and for 'De Stijl' as a whole - art is indeed a 'comparison of the universe', a comparison which is to be realized by man in the sense of the biblical parable: 'In order to get conscious of the necessity of another social organisation, we can hardly ever follow assiduously enough that which the culture of art has shown to us. Let us repeat in this connection that the essential content of art consists in the annihilation of the individual oppression by form as well as in the creation of the rhythm of universal expression (.....). The rectangular planes of different dimensions and different colours demonstrate satisfactorily that internationalism involves no chaos at all, in which monotony is going to be the dominant feature, but that it will lead us up to a unity, that is well-ordered and sharply divided. There are even very pronounced limits in neo-plasticism. But these limits are not really closed: the straight lines in their rectangular opposition intersect constantly, in order that their rhythm may continue in the whole of the work. Equally, in the future international order, the various countries because of their being mutually equivalent, will then own their proper and equivalent values. There will be just frontiers, exactly in pro-

portion to the value of each country in relation to the general federation. These frontiers will be clearly limited but not "closed": no customs, no passports.'[414]

But art does not only forecast life's development; it indicates also the line of conduct for humanity and for every individual: 'To see reality clearly as it is and not the way we like to conceive it, that is what New Art teaches us. On its marvellous progress as to science and technics, life gradually advances towards the acquisition of this capacity. But equally New Art has revealed to us - and this is of the utmost importance - that we ought to abstain from passing for anything we are not. It has disclosed that frankness and sincerity are the primordial conditions of New Life.'[415] These are the moral implications of neo-plasticism, leading up to as well as towards 'New Life'.

'New Life' - the realization of universal equilibrium in human society - is the ultimate aim and painting acts as a fore-runner of 'New Life' - a strange but not unusual Johannean conception. 'Art is now partly in decay; but its end would at present be premature (.....). Great truths, which have been uttered, are no more realized in their art. It is as if people were afraid of their own consistency. The new is proved to be not yet ripe in those who have promoted it. However, the great beginning has been made. By this beginning, the great consistency has been able to manifest itself. From this new motion, neo-plasticism has proceded: a totally different art, a new plasticity. As purified art it shows clearly the laws generally valid, on which new reality is to be built.'[416] And another passage from one of his later essays: 'If we conceive of truly human life as continuous enjoyment in discovering and creating concrete equilibrium, then this equilibrium becomes essential to us. All abstract expression in life, like science, philosophy and all abstract creations like art, may be regarded as only so many means to attain equilibrium. "Art" is only a "substitute" as long as the beauty of life is still deficient. It will disappear in proportion as life gains equilibrium. Today art is still of the greatest importance because it demonstrates practically in a direct way, liberated of individual conceptions, the law of equilibrium.'[417] And the idea of art as a substitute is emphasized already in an article in *De Stijl*: 'During centuries art has been a substitute, which reconciled human nature with outward life. "Represented" beauty kept up the belief in "real" beauty. It causes - though on a limited scale and in a limited way - the contemplative vision of beauty. Where "faith" demands a superhuman abstraction for its life in harmony, where science is able to show harmony by reason, art makes us experience harmony by our entire human nature. Thus it can imbue our nature with beauty, till beauty has become at one with us. Then we shall realize beauty in everything: our external surroundings will reach equivalent relations with our human essence.'[418] And in his last essays, when describing this ultimate phase of art, he sounds an apocalyptic note: 'Culture produces relative consciousness of the changeable expression of reality. When this consciousness is attained, a revolt takes place: the beginning of that deliverance from the expression of reality. Destruction of its own limitations follows. The culture of the intuitive faculties has conquered. A clearer perception of constant reality

is possible. A new realism appears. All this is manifested in the course of the culture of plastic art. We see the culture of the form ending in a struggle for the deliverance from the limitations of form.'[419]

Mondriaan has voiced 'De Stijl's' notion of art as a moving force for the future development of society. This motion implies as we have seen, the liberty of art from all social or political ties in 'De Stijl's' own period. Mondriaan, in his messianic ecstasy, did not pay much attention to this problem of his own days, Van Doesburg, however, advocates an art that is not dominated by social features, but which sets its seal on the social development of humanity: 'Art, as we postulate it is neither proletarian not bourgeois. It develops forces which are strong enough to influence the whole of culture, instead of being influenced by social relations.'[420] And his utopian notion - though projected in his own time, finds a strong and convincing accent with Van Doesburg: There is no art created by proletarians, as the proletarian, when he has created art, ceases to be a proletarian and becomes an artist. The artist is neither a proletarian nor a bourgeois and what he creates belongs neither to the proletariat nor to the bourgeoisie. It belongs to everyone. Art is a spiritual activity in man, with the aim to deliver him from the chaos of life, from tragedy. Art is free in the application of its means, but bound by its own laws and by nothing but its laws. As soon as a work is a work of art, it exceeds by far the class difference between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.[421] The law of universal unity, which has been manifested by art, is going to abolish the differences of the classes - there is a new proof of 'De Stijl's' universal vision and its utopian consequences. The whole trend of thought is summed up in a passage from one of Mondriaan's essays: 'Even in spite of us, we participate in the grand and perfect composition of life, which - if only we are keen in observing it - establishes itself according to the development of art.'[422]

This conception of life leads to a utopian vision of the future, to a projection of all solutions of moral and social problems into a utopian future. For it has to be emphasized that Mondriaan was well aware of these problems, and that he - a delicate and susceptible character with a great and untrammelled sensibility, - suffered deeply from them. There is no better proof than a passage from his booklet *Art and Life*: 'One of the worst vices of man is the exploitation of his fellow-men. (.....) In our to-day's society the exploitation of others is practised in so cunning a way, that this vileness almost manages to remain unpunished. (...) The exploitation of others is indeed a theft. (...) Nothing but life itself will do away with the abuse. The progress of civilization - though often effecting it - will render it impossible in the end. Warranting man an independent existence in the material as well as in the immaterial domain of life is the most urgent task, to which we have thus to apply ourselves first of all. New Life will never liberate man but for his continuous cultivating of the individual and its mutual relations.'[423] New Life, that is the messianic solution to these problems and New Life is already heralded by neoplasticism. In this context one fact, which has been commonly disregarded, cannot be sufficiently emphasized: the dedication of his, Mondriaan's pamphlet of 1920: 'Le Neoplasticisme', 'aux

hommes futurs'.[424] Additional emphasis is given to these words by a passage from the same pamphlet: 'For let us not forget that we are at a turning point of culture, at the end of the old; the separation is absolute and definite.'[425] And in an article, dating from 1927, we find a phrase of meaning that we had already come across before: 'our time, that is to say, future, claims pure equilibrium and that is not possible except in one way.'[426] Indeed Mondriaan is so absorbed in his vision of perfect reality, that he does no longer consider it as distant or only promised: he already lives in the New Era. His universal vision has become a reality for him. 'For new man, the universal is not a vague idea, but a living reality, which manifests itself visibly and audibly.'[427]

For new man and his achievements Mondriaan finds words of enthusiasm and deep confidence: he will embody the perfection of progress: 'Yes, this interior life will create its exterior manifestation; abstract-real life will realize itself in external life and, consequently, in all external appearance. Then the new man will find his exteriorisation and thereby complete his happiness (.....). An image of beauty, more freed from the material, must re-create material society.'[428] Never has an aesthetical, a universalist conception gone so far as to create a new image of society and an image of new man. Yet, this image exists quite positively: 'At present production by the worker is mass-production and it needs to be so. This production is led by intellectuals or artists; from these a new art may be expected. The worker, by way of speaking, is too much of a machine and like bourgeoisie or aristocracy, too much concerned with material things only. It is the new man, the result of the worker, the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, but entirely different from these, out of whom neoplasticism is to materialize and for whom it is intended. Only he will be able to realize the new spirit of the times in the sense of beauty as well, in society and in plastic expression.'[429] And elsewhere in *De Stijl*: 'The new man needs indeed to be quite different from the man of the past. "New Man" performs all material business but he performs it by necessity. He performs it just as well, but he takes a different attitude towards it.'[430]

Man of to-day is to build the New Life. And the New Life is to be as different from the old one, as the new man from his predecessor. 'Art demonstrates that new life is not in the least the simple creation of new forms and new relations in the individual, social, political and economic range, - though they will be so much the more for all that - but too that the status of purification serves only to make them more and more susceptible to the constitution of an entirely new organization abolishing by its creating of equivalent relation, all those particular concerns detrimental to others.'[431] In this new organization the mutual relations will be established according to universal equilibrium, as neo-plasticism has already manifested it: 'New Art grants an independent existence to the line and the colour in the sense of their being neither oppressed nor disfigured by the particular form, but shaping their own limitations by themselves and this in the exactest appropriation to their proper nature. Thus society will equally grant an independent existence, homogenous to its proper character to every individual in the future New Life.'[432] 'New Life' indeed bears all the hall-marks

of utopia; the more so as it is built up according to one leading principle: universal harmony, as manifested by neoplasticism. ‘Mankind is going to see the day that the individual will be capable of governing himself. This too has been proved by New Art. (...) A general concentration upon the proper and mutual relationships will solve all social difficulties. Those among mankind who have been most rightly disgusted at the misery of man's concrete life, have never stopped taking refuge in the action of creating or of contemplating the mutual relations of the planes, the lines and the colours, which because of their neutralizing the descriptive properties of the forms, establish beauty independently from concrete life. (...) If these representations in art are able to touch mankind to so extreme a degree, why are they so utterly uncared for in life? Fugitive interests, though being yet useful to human evolution for a small space of time, are the cause of this neglect - fugitive interests, inherent in concrete life, which we are only too glad not to meet in art.’[433]. Life therefore, should develop towards a similar disinterestedness, towards an equal degree of abstraction as in neoplastic art. ‘In order to reach unity, life will have to grow from external into abstract - real life. At present this life forms a period of transition between the old and the new time. Abstract real life is no longer an exclusively natural life and still it is not unnatural either. Nor is it an exclusively spiritual life and yet the spiritual is its content.’[434]

Art is to be the guide towards this better and more illumined era; art, having first discerned and then materialized the laws of universal equilibrium, is to lead the way. It is important indeed, that the universal - and utopian - conception of life and the world has re-integrated art into a general pattern of human activity. It has indeed re-assigned to art a task, which leads further than the creation of a work of art, - though it implies this creation. It is one of the important achievements of ‘De Stijl’ to have revised - by its universal conception of human existence - the orientation of art: ‘Full comprehension of the equivalence of the contrasting oppositions of the rhythm of art is able to support us in our working towards the edification of a truly human life. For it is exactly this establishing of the equilibrium by means of the equivalence of the two fundamental oppositions, that which man takes the least trouble of. Yet it is this equivalence which creates individual freedom, delivers us from suffering and liberates us from the limiting material and immaterial forms.’[435]

Art is to lead the way, but it can do even more: it can create a material environment for man which, by its harmony, inspires him continually to recognize it as such. ‘The application of these laws (of denaturalisation) will abolish the tragic outlook of the home, the street and the city. Joy, moral and physical joy, the joy of health will spread by the oppositions of relation, of measure and colour, of matter and of space, which are to be emphasized by the relations of position. With a little goodwill it will not be so impossible to create an earthly paradise.’[436]

Art is to lead the way towards an earthly paradise by manifesting the laws according to which it is going to be built and by confronting man with its works which already announce the future beauty. But then, once this task is accom-

plished, there will be no more room for art in human society. Mondriaan's aesthetic utopia implies the end of art: 'Art will remain a manifestation and a means until this equilibrium will be (relatively) attained. It will then have done its work and harmony will realize itself in exterior surroundings as well as in exterior life. The domination of the tragical in life will have come to an end.'[437] Art is to end: its moral and social task accomplished in the future, perfect era, the 'new life' in which there is no need for a mediator between universal harmony and man. There, harmony will appear unveiled and art would run a risk of diverting the attention from perfection, i.e. universal beauty. Art, in the society of the future has no reason to be used as a refuge, as it is in the present day: 'Environment as well as life show their own inferiority by their defective state and barren necessity. Art therefore, is the refuge. In art people try to find beauty and harmony and not, or vainly so, in life or in their surroundings. Thus beauty and harmony have become "ideals", unattainable ones, they have been isolated from life and surroundings by becoming "art" (.....). Thus attention has been diverted from real life and from true beauty'.[438] This phase of the evolution of art, in which art is a refuge and a mere substitute for beauty, universal beauty to come, has been termed by Mondriaan the age of 'Lyricism'. Lyricism only bars the way to universal beauty, as it is still imbued with tragic emotions; neoplasticism has destroyed its domination. 'Neoplasticism only has replaced lyricism by pure plastic expression. Art can be almost "super-human" and universal by the profound, but varying rhythm of relations only, by an almost mathematical means of expression. And this is possible, even now, for in our time, art is ahead of life.'[439]

But when life proceeds still further, and approaches the realization of universal harmony, art will become superfluous. This period marks the beginning of the new era: 'By the realization of aesthetics in matter, an attitude towards life will result, which is to abolish the division between the Beyond and reality. This manifestation of life as a totality, sponsors the beginning of a new culture.'[440] It is Van Doesburg who wrote these lines and Vantongerloo shares his views on the future, though with a different accent: 'The new era will perhaps, give art to society. And society is everybody. It is anonymous, it has no owner. It has only workers and owners of brains. Society will bring forth a work of pleasure, that will be a source of intelligence instead of dullness. This new era will permit us to carry on our own evolution, while our present civilisation lead us into a blind alley.'[441] And elsewhere: 'But the time will come, the pure plastic manifestation of art will lead us towards a pure and universal aesthetic solution. (...) Everything progresses, everything develops and the time is not far off, when art and science will be a homogenous union.'[442] In Vantongerloo's terms, this comes down to practically the same that Mondriaan had predicted: the end of art.

Neoplasticism is the first announcement of this new era; its appearance marks the turning point. 'Neoplasticism is ahead of time, the plastic expression of a turning point in human evolution, of the era of equivalence of the one and the other. When this era will have come about, art will pass into real life'.[443] And

elsewhere: ‘When art transforms itself into real life. then only the end of our present-day's art is come. But it will take a long time, before even neoplasticism to its whole extent has been digested by humanity - this art implies the end of art but actually it is a beginning.’[444] Art, in the future development of culture, will thus be relieved by life, in regard to the realization of harmony: ‘As long as the individual dominates the consciousness of time, art remains tied to everyday life, and is in the main, an expression of this life. But once the universal dominates life, it will be so imbued with the universal, that art - so unreal in comparison with this life, - will fall into disuse, a new life will take its place, which indeed realizes the universal.’[445]

The full significance of Mondriaan's Utopian vision, of the end of art is made clear from an important passage from the third volume of *De Stijl*: ‘One day the time will come, when we shall be able to do without all the arts, as we know them now; beauty will then have ripened into palpable reality. Humanity will not lose much by missing art.’[446] And Van Doesburg voices the same idea when he writes: ‘There will be no longer any need, in a collective culture, for this licentiousness of sentiment. On a higher level of culture, free painting and sculpture will simply cease to exist.’[447] And in a letter to Anthony Kok, (dated February 11th, 1915, well before the foundation of ‘De Stijl’) he writes: ‘Van Domselaer said that later there would be no need of art; all images and all sounds will be superfluous. There are moments when I already live in this “later”. Oh, that these days may come soon!’[448]

The ultimate aim of this evolution, therefore, is the superfluity of art, its disappearance. For the time being, neoplasticism is to continue on the road towards the realization of harmony; demonstrating the laws of universal balance, creating an outward reality, which confirms these laws and announces a brighter future. In his dialogue, Mondriaan deals with this immediate future, this period of transition as follows: ‘A.: You do then leave some room for natural painting, as well as for melody in music. But do you think that the future will outgrow these expressions? B.: As one begins to experience harmony more purely, the relations of colours and sound will be manifested more purely too, this seems only logical to me. A.: Neoplasticism, therefore, is the end of painting? B.: In so far as it is impossible to manifest equilibrated relations even more purely in art. Neoplasticism has only been born lately, it still has to culminate.’[449] Neoplasticism however, marks a new period, the beginning of development towards this pre-established future... ‘Ancient art is the art of infants, neoplasticism is the art of adults.’[450]

But the more culture develops, the less neoplasticism will be limited to painting; painting has only discovered the possibility of plastically realizing universal equilibrium, the other branches of the arts will have to realize this in their turn, in order to create a harmonious environment for man. ‘At present, neoplasticism manifests in painting, what will one day surround us in the form of architecture and sculpture.’[451] And with regard to architecture: ‘As long as there is no completely new architecture, painting has to do what architecture - as it appears now - has been too backward to realize: create equili-

brated relations or, in other terms, to be a truly abstract manifestation (.....). Our surroundings will still keep off abstract reality for a long time to come. But this is exactly why abstract real painting, is for the time being the rescueing substitute.'[452] Another passage is also very revealing: 'The fact, that our time is not yet ripe for the materialization of architecture as a whole, so that neo-plasticism has still to be presented in painting, will be of influence on the abstract - real creation of to-day.'[453] And writing of the possibility of creating a building which will be able to retain its aesthetic values, in spite of the march of time, and the passing of generations, Mondriaan says: 'It is possible, or at least, it will soon be possible, to create by buildings a pure manifestation of the immovable, i.e., that which remains the same to every generation.'[454]

But not only architecture and painting - for all arts in the future are to dissolve into real life, when the phase of the realization of harmony in life has been attained, no one manifestation of art in life will have the right to a separate and secluded existence. 'For the new man, the theatre is, if not a nuisance, at least a superfluity. The new spirit, when it reaches its culminating point, will interiorize gesture and mimics; it will realize in everyday life what the theatre has shown and described externally.'[455] And the same about the dance: 'In new art, the dance will suffer the fate of the gesture and of mimics. It will pass from art into life. One will renounce the spectacle of the dance, (ballet, etc.), as one realizes rhythm by itseIf.'[456]

In *De Stijl*, Mondriaan gives a description of the place where neoplasticist music will be performed: This description is a fascinating example of spiritual and utopian imagination of a scene, entirely corresponding to the universal vision, almost devoid of all material and sensual attraction. The description culminates in this passage: 'In short, it will no longer be a theatre or a church, but an open and airy edifice, which will satisfy all the demands of beauty and usefulness, of mind and matter.'[457]

The vision of the future, the utopian thought, sometimes verges on the religious: we have seen that Mondriaan's vision of the future quite often floats on a messianic current of thought. But it is Van Doesburg as well who voices these feelings, when writing: 'As only modern, abstract art is capable of realizing this mediation (between man and the absolute, (ed.)), because the natural (particular) has been annihilated in it, this most perfect expression of art is to be the future substitute for the ritual acts of religion, dissolving them into pure aesthetics in other forms, such as, f.i., the figures of a dance or plastic gestures.'[458]

To Mondriaan and to his fellow-artists of 'De Stijl', art had indeed an almost religious significance. Their belief in the universal force, in the laws of harmony, brought forth a vision of the future which may well be termed messianic. On the other hand it should be remembered that art, for the artists of 'De Stijl', was not subject to any religious doctrine; it was, on the contrary, the direct mediator between the universal force and man. Therefore, the artists of 'De Stijl' and most prominently amongst them Mondriaan, felt an almost sacerdotal vocation. In a way which perhaps was linked with his Calvinistic origin and its source in the Old Testament, he devoted himself to what he must almost have felt as a

ministry. This attitude of devotion to some kind of holy office revealed itself in his entire behaviour; it is shown clearly in his work, in his writings and in his life. For Mondriaan, the practice of an artist's profession meant more than the inner urge to create works of art; it implied a constant striving for an 'unio mystica' with the absolute, and the zeal to preach this mystical union to his fellow-men. For Mondriaan, art meant more than a communication of his own feelings to humanity: as a priest, he was to subdue his own emotions for the sake of what he called the absolute. It was the absolute which inspired all his works and actions; art, to him, was the service, through which life is sanctified.

It is so moving therefore to read the following passage on the realization of equilibrium from his trialogue and to think at the same time of his work and his completely self-denying life: 'By being strong enough to start by not considering the material as the main issue... but that calls for sacrifices! We have to begin by sacrificing ourselves, for an ideal, for a new society now is nothing but just that. We ought to begin by creating, in every respect, an image of what society is one day to realize (.....). When the new man will have recreated nature to conform to what he will then be: nature and non-nature in equilibrated relations, then man - and you too - will have "re"-gained Paradise on earth.'[459]

All his Utopian views an ideas are but the consequence of this self-denying and indeed, heroic faith. And all his later formulations of a Utopian future are but elaborations of this almost religious conception. When Mondriaan writes, at the end of his life and during the war, his essay *Liberation from oppression in art and life*, he strikes the same chord: 'In plastic art, we see the mutual oppression of forms and colours annihilated by the creation of mutual equivalent values. Whereas in art this is a moral struggle, in life the struggle is physical as well. In life the physically strongest seems to dominate. How is oppression to be vanquished? How is equilibrium to be created? How are equivalent values to be established? Time must solve these problems. For those who can see, the way is revealed in life and in art. Life, being intrinsically in equilibrium, ends oppression through the resistance created by itself. Then a new and better life becomes certain.'[460] It is therefore the same, dialectic law which he and the artists of 'De Stijl' have established in art, that will lead to a better future. And the experience of neo-plastic works of art will facilitate for humanity the road towards this future: 'Though neo-plasticism expresses the end of human culture as an accomplished fact, this end indicates us at the same time the next steps we are going to take. And though the mutual equality, which has been manifested by neo-plasticism cannot be realized in the life now prevailing, yet New Art has shown us that even in our days it is possible to constitute pure forms as well as pure relations and establish a new organization by means of them, allowing a life of greater liberty already in our time, a life, which as a consequence will be more unified at any rate, indeed.'[461].

In this sense, Mondriaan's Utopism has to be understood. It is in connection with this moving passage from *De Stijl* that the following phrase from one of his later essays, of 1942, might be quoted: 'Our way leads towards the search

for the equivalence of life's unequal oppositions. Because it is free of all utilitarian limitations, plastic art must move not only parallel with human progress, but must advance ahead of it. It is the task of art to express a clear vision of reality.'[462]

Mondriaan knew well enough that 'the new image of the world' - his image and not Dr. Schoenmaekers' theory - was still to remain Utopian for a long time. But without this sacerdotal zeal, without that almost priestly vocation and the Utopian, or rather Messianic, conception resulting from it 'De Stijl' would have never been able to lay the corner stone of a brighter and clearer outer world. Mondriaan has himself expressed this confidence in the progressive vision of 'De Stijl': 'I have always opposed the individual in man and have tried to demonstrate the value of universal vision, but it must not be concluded from this that I am an advocate of collectivism in the present time. Collectivism in its broadest meaning is for the future. Luckily enough even a single individual is capable of universal vision.'[463]

Mondriaan was indeed capable of universal vision. He has expressed it in his works, in his essays and in his imaginings of the future. All three facts have been, each in its way, an important contribution to the artistic development, to the actual work of 'De Stijl' in realizing a brighter world in its own period. Mondriaan's vision of the future has certainly been essential for the realization of 'De Stijl's' practical task of purifying and brightening the face of the world today. Van Doesburg describes it as follows: 'The future style will above all be a style of deliverance and of vital repose'[464] and this would not have been possible without Mondriaan's vision of the future and his consciousness of an artistic ministry. It was in view of this realization, which we must examine now, that Mondriaan wrote in 1931: 'But what a fine task still lies ahead of art, preparing this future.'[465]

The realization of 'De Stijl's' conceptions

Up to this point we have examined the growth and the crystallisation of 'De Stijl's' conceptions. We have considered the rise of neo-plasticism in painting, and the Utopian consequences, which had been extracted from it principally by Mondriaan. We have seen that Mondriaan had postulated a new human environment, based on the manifestation of universal equilibrium, which painting had realized through neo-plasticism: 'The work of art is to be the way towards realizing a new manifestation of our surroundings.'[466] But this thesis has remained a postulate one, based on speculative thought and on a conception of the universal. The aprioristic notion that art is a visual expression of universal truth had led Mondriaan to make his moral claim: 'What is true in art must also be true in human life.'[467] And it is the same universal conception which inspired his almost religious faith in the force of these universal laws: 'Art leads the way, where formerly religion led; essentially, religion implied: the digestion of the natural'[468] And also: 'Art, being superhuman, cultivates the superhuman

element in man and hence has become a means for humanity's evolution, of equal importance as religion.'[469] It is once more the aprioristic conception of the universal force which made Mondriaan believe in the practical usefulness of neo-plasticism: 'The purely plastic and logical solution is always in agreement with practical needs, because the one and the other are both only a question of equilibrium.'[470] It is this universalist, aprioristic conception which finds an expression in Mondriaan's 'New realism' and in Vantongerloo's mathematical mysticism, expressed in a phrase, as, for instance: 'Art is concerned with life (.....). Art starts from unity, and therefore it cannot, by itself, reflect anything but unity or harmony (.....). Now, modern art tries to create a culture of an interior character. The artist starts from a (speculative) content of nature, that is to say from the spirit. Visible nature is but an intermediary element. The artist works from within towards the outward, instead of working from the outward towards the inner world.'[471]

Mondriaan and many others of 'De Stijl' were sincerely addicted to this universalist conception of the outer and inner world and for a certain time, during the last years of the first world war, this conception appeared to be 'De Stijl's' fixed rule of conduct. It is perhaps the influence of the spiritual atmosphere of Laren which led towards the acceptance of this trend of thought; Van Doesburg writes about it as follows: 'Laren seems to me a wonderful place for quiet thought. Many people who live there concern themselves with abstract life. I know for certain that they would find your ideas very good, that is to say, pure.'[472]

It is necessary to cast another quick glance at this aspect of 'De Stijl's' attitude, as there is still another side to 'De Stijl's' conception and activity, which is to be treated in the following pages. The aprioristic and therefore Utopian conception always prevailed with Mondriaan and during the time when he still lived in Holland - that is to say until 1919 - it even dominated 'De Stijl's' conception of life and of the world. This domination is one of the reasons why Van der Leck left 'De Stijl' so soon, as we shall see later. With Mondriaan, however, this universalist conception reaches its culminating point and its clearest formulation during the last years of his life, when he lived in New York. Thus, the passages from Mondriaan's essays on art and its significance to life, quoted here, are for the greater part about 11 years later in date than the end of 'De Stijl' - they represent, nevertheless, a trend of thought which had dominated its activity at its very beginning. 'Plastic art establishes the true image of reality, for its primary function is to "show", not to describe. It is up to us to see what it represents. It cannot reveal more than life teaches, but it can evoke in us the conviction of existent truth. The culture of plastic art can enlighten mankind, for it not only reveals human culture, but being free, advances it.'[473] This passage of 1942 has, however, been preceded in 1920 by the final lines of *Le Néo-plasticisme*, expressing more or less the same thought: 'So man creates a new beauty by the new spirit, while formerly he sang or represented plastically only the beauty of nature. This new beauty has become indispensable to the new man, as it expresses his own image in opposing equal values. New Art is born.'[474] And it is from this point of view that Mondriaan considers the question of art's

task in human society: '...is art still necessary and useful to human society? (.....) (.....). The new art is, however, still very necessary to life. In a clear manner, it established the laws according to which a real balance is reached. Moreover, it must create among us a profoundly human and rich beauty, realized not only by the best qualities of the new architecture, but also by all that constructive art in painting and sculpture makes possible (.....). It is a great pity that those who are concerned with social life in general do not realize the utility of pure abstract art.'[475] And in the same context he writes 'What is certain is, that no escape is possible for the non-figurative artist; he must stay within his field and march towards the consequences of his art. This consequence bring us, in a future perhaps remote, towards the end of art as a thing separate from our surrounding environment, which is the actual plastic reality. But this end is at the same time a new beginning. Art will not only continue, but will realize itself more and more. By the unification of architecture, sculpture and painting, a new plastic reality will be created. Painting and sculpture will not manifest themselves as separate objects, nor as "mural art" which destroys architecture itself, nor as "applied art", but being purely constructive, will aid the creation of an atmosphere not merely utilitarian or rational, but also pure and complete in its beauty.'[476]

Mondriaan's conception of art's task in human society implies a future realization of 'unification of architecture, sculpture and painting', resulting in the creation of 'an atmosphere not merely utilitarian or rational but also pure and complete in its beauty', and besides this, the task to lead the way 'towards a clearer establishment of the content of art: the uniting of man with the universe.'[477] This second task had already been set out in an article in *De Stijl* in 1920: 'The artist of today must lead the way in every respect in the direction of his period.'[478] It is emphasized again in one of his later essays, in a passage previously quoted: 'All abstract expressions in life, like science, philosophy and all abstract creations like art, can be regarded only as so many means to attain equilibrium. "Art" is only a "substitute" while the beauty of life is still deficient. It will disappear in proportion, as life gains in equilibrium.'[479] It therefore implies an orientation of art in the direction of the objectivity already attained by science and logics. This conception of the task of art was formulated by Mondriaan most clearly in 1936: 'Not only science, but art also, show us that reality, at first incomprehensible, gradually reveals itself, by the mutual relations that are inherent in things. Pure science and pure art, disinterested and free, can lead the advance in the recognition of the laws which are based on these relationships. A great scholar recently said: pure science achieves practical results for humanity. Similarly one can say that pure art, even though it appear abstract, can be of direct utility for life. Art shows us that there are also constant truths concerning forms. Every form, every line has its own expression.'[480]

This is the tenet of 'De Stijl's' creed, which has been most clearly and courageously emphasized by Mondriaan: To discover and to manifest, for the benefit of humanity, the pattern according to which life and the universe continue on their course. It is a new and a most important task for art. It is, indeed, a 'revalua-

tion of values', that art should go before and influence human development, instead of following after, as it had done so far. In a letter, addressed to Van Eesteren, and dealing with his booklet *Art and life*, he writes: 'I have added an introduction to my booklet, as people do not see why a painter should concern himself with the laws of life; they do not understand, that the laws of life realize themselves perhaps most clearly in art. In the art of the past they are vague, but in modern art and especially in my work, they show clearly. Thus I can develop things and record laws, according to which life proceeds, and everything that concerns equilibrium and happiness in life becomes real and not illusionary. I have built up everything on observation, but as observation implies a whole culture, it is painting that is so well adapted to show balance and happiness, as the art of observation has come to the end of its culture, and we are able to review all of it.'[481] These lines do indeed characterize Mondriaan's views most clearly. He was concerned with the laws of life, with a 'new image of the world', and his whole development, from his early naturalistic painting to the very last works of his American period, is nothing but an unerring and constant evolution towards this end. The results of this development have truly changed the aspect as well as the meaning of contemporary art: the aspect in so far, that the abstract elements of painting - straight lines in rectangular opposition and primary colour - became the exclusive means of expression. The meaning of art, its significance, changed in an even more revolutionary sense: painting did no longer follow the trends of nature or of human thought, but aimed at establishing, by its own means, the laws which nature and the human mind obey. The artists' activity had become very similar to the work of a man of science or of a philosopher: these are both engaged in the search for a solution of what man has called for centuries 'the world's enigma'. In science this research tends to be experimental, in philosophy and art rather more speculative; in any case, it is concerned with the universe and not with any particular phenomenon. To have made painting the medium of demonstrating of its own accord, that equilibrium which he considered to be the law of the universe and of human life, has been Mondriaan's unswerving aim and daring achievement.

Mondriaan's entire thought and energy were concentrated on this one problem: the establishment of equilibrium. Since he had discovered - with Van der Leck and Van Doesburg - the laws of abstract composition in 1917, and after his establishment of neo-plasticism in 1920, his pictorial evolution shows but few oscillations: right up to the end there is only a steady and consistent course towards perfection. This perfectionism is typical of Mondriaan, of his personality as well as of his conception of life: it is a constant effort to come closer and closer to the absolute, to objective truth. Once he had discovered the problem, which was essential to him, he concentrated all his efforts on its solution. And once in possession of this solution - the realization of equilibrium by abstract means - in the field of painting, he devoted his thoughts to the application of this solution to various other branches of the arts, such as the theatre, dancing, etc.

His series of essays, from his first articles in *De Stijl* to his final publications

in 1942, are a continuous repetition and elaboration of one idea, applied to the most divergent currents of human activity, but all starting from one aprioristic point and developing to still greater perfection; like many men of science, he became almost possessed by this idea, more so as he felt that the future and the happiness of humanity was at stake. But, again like many scientists, he was little concerned with the practical realization of his ideas: in his utterly modest, almost timid way he left that to others. He saw the aim, but its realization remained for him a promised land, Utopia. He always lived rather apart from society, like one of the spiritual hermits which, in the 19th and 20th centuries, have become less rare a phenomenon: his contemplative spirit was distracted by the irrelevance of casual social contact. In 1916 already, Van Doesburg wrote of him with some exaggeration: 'Mondriaan, however, is not a man to have friends; he prefers to remain apart and does not like to make the acquaintance of others.'[482] In his Paris studio, 26, rue du Départ, he became one of those solitary and ardent fanatics of an idea. Such men generally are universal by the power of their idea, and restrained by the fact that everything apart from this idea is beyond their reach. It is the power of this idea, the ardent faith in its truth and validity, and the universal reach of his thought, that made Mondriaan the great artist he was. It is his rectilinear thought-a 'one track mind' indeed-that was such an indispensable contribution to establish and to carry on 'De Stijl', the foundation and development of which is inconceivable without Mondriaan.

Mondriaan's limitations, on the other hand, emphasize even more the importance of the other contributors to 'De Stijl': Van Doesburg, Oud, Van der Leck, Rietveld and Van Eesteren. The reason why their names have been brought together in chronological order here, is that they have all, more or less, participated in the 'incarnation' of 'De Stijl'. Indeed, with Mondriaan alone 'De Stijl' might have remained an idea. It is the very important and greatly underrated contribution of these other artists, that they have concerned themselves with the realization, with the incarnation of this idea, which had come to clearer delineation by their joint efforts and studies. This realization of 'De Stijl's' ideas on the various arts has produced results which in their turn have stimulated the further development of 'De Stijl' as an idea and as practical discipline. The history and the character of 'De Stijl' are therefore by no means exclusively the development of an idea and its application to reality extant - it is at least as much a question of the continuous reaction of its realization on the original conception of the artists. It is the continuous interrelation of the realization with the leading idea, of the varying personal approach with the constant objective rule, which gives such an intense and dynamic life to 'De Stijl' during its short career - barely 15 years. But 'De Stijl' as an historic fact, is more than a consistent universal ideology, or a collection of essays, which, together, have established a new conception of art. It is a series of specific realizations which are - to be sure - the consequences of this conception. The foremost importance of the other artists' contribution, however, is to have realized the principal aim of 'De Stijl': the creation of a brighter and happier

environment for mankind. Their work did not attain the aim of universal equilibrium to the same extent as Mondriaan's; they did, however, succeed in effecting what was ‘De Stijl's’ first and essential aim, the aim from which it derived its name: ‘style’.

It was Van Doesburg, who selected this name for his periodical and for the working group, which was the result of its foundation. He had abandoned his original idea of calling his review *The straight line* and had named it *De Stijl*. This fact, by itself, is perhaps already an indication for the direction in which Van Doesburg intended to lead his review and its work. Van Doesburg, the leader of ‘De Stijl’ has usually been characterized as ‘De Stijl's’ theorist. This conception, which is but half a truth, threatens to confuse the image of ‘De Stijl’. Of course, Van Doesburg was a brilliant lecturer who indefatigably explained the principles of ‘De Stijl’ in lectures and at discussions, congresses and meetings all over Europe. He feared neither fatigue nor criticism, he dealt gladly and wittily with attacks - even quite obvious ones. His extensive lecturing and informative activity gained him the reputation of ‘De Stijl's’ theorist, This pronouncement should be revised: Van Doesburg's theoretic activity was but the result of his main ambition: to achieve. This main preoccupation of his is well expressed in an article in *De Stijl*: ‘The first task of the younger generation is: to proclaim that creative work of all kinds is the right of everybody, at the same time convincing the great masses systematically of the sanity and validity of their principles and achievements.’[483]

Van Doesburg, from the point of view of ‘De Stijl's’ idea, was much less a theorist than Mondriaan. In spite of the consistency of his ideas, he did not know that fanatical allegiance to one dominating idea, the idea of universal equilibrium. His qualities were not the exclusive, the almost monomaniac concentration on that idea - he was a man of expansive vision and character, who loved to conquer wide fields of human cultural activity for the realization of ‘De Stijl's’ ideas. In fact, so overwhelming was his expansive energy, that he had to split it up into three different individuals (Van Doesburg, I.K. Bonset, Aldo Camini) in order to realize the different aspects of his vast and varied personality. But one quality dominated all of its aspects: the desire to achieve results.

Van Doesburg was much less a purist than Mondriaan - his broad and extensive interest made him well aware of the impossibility to apply an idea uncompromisingly to every aspect of nature and life - but he always remained faithful to the original conception of ‘De Stijl’, which he developed and even altered as a result of its progressive realization.

There is one essential feature in Van Doesburg's character and personality, which qualified him for the leadership of that conglomeration that was ‘De Stijl’; Van Doesburg was never a specialist, not of any particular idea or of any particular discipline, but he executed his varying tasks - the realization of ‘De Stijl's’ idea in the different domains of life - with an indefatigable enthusiasm and a self-denying devotion which is the heritage of all true dilettantes.

Van Doesburg's personality and his ambition for results has left its mark on

the face and on the development of ‘De Stijl’. It was he who directed ‘De Stijl's’ machinery: as the editor of *De Stijl* he selected the articles to be published; as the leader of the group he accepted new ‘members’ and, sometimes, estranged and lost old ones. But during almost 15 years of ‘De Stijl's’ existence, it was always Van Doesburg who inspired the realizations of the other members, who encouraged them and helped them, through his generosity, to materialize their ideas. This is why a short note on Van Doesburg's personality had to introduce the pages, dedicated to ‘De Stijl's’ realizations. An appreciation of the contributions of the other artists will be found in the discussion of their work. Part of this work, though quite personal and independent, has nevertheless been inspired and instigated by Van Doesburg. And it is certainly due to him that ‘De Stijl’ found its orientation, which has given it its importance with regard to contemporary life: the realization of style, that is to say the creation of an artistic expression, capable of reflecting and expressing the period's character while at the same time satisfying its needs.

This orientation towards the realization of ‘De Stijl's’ principles implies a different conception of the artist's task; it no longer means the preparations for Utopia, but an active concern with man's present surroundings and the striving for its improvement, its perfection. The artist's first task is active intervention in imperfect conditions and a contemplative preparation of future perfection takes a second place.

The artist is to be more concerned with mankind of his own period than with the ‘man of the future’. But the fact that both these attitudes coincided in ‘De Stijl’ gave it its power to develop both an ideology and a concrete realization.

Van Doesburg has worded this, far less absolutist, conception in his lecture *The new movement in painting:* ‘Life is in continuous motion; art, the subject of which is life's content, as well. If, therefore, we keep pace with it, the time will never come when art becomes incomprehensible to us. As soon as expression in art becomes incomprehensible, we can safely assume that we have come to a standstill while art has moved ahead of us.’[485] Therefore, his own art and ‘De Stijl’ as well had to be kept in continuous movement: a constant dynamism was its most outstanding feature. Equilibrium, in the absolute sense of Mondriaan's conception, was excluded; there too, lies the reason for Van Doesburg's ‘elementarism’ and the estrangement between Mondriaan and himself. In 1926 Van Doesburg writes about this aspect of evolution: ‘This equilibrium as a new culture would not permit any further developments. This equilibrium, being a new form and manifestation, could not be improved upon or developed. Equilibrium once attained, in this case would be absolute instead of relative, stable instead of variable, it would be eternal and unchangeable. This, of course, is impossible.’[486]

His conception was not the result of his dispute with Mondriaan; it had already been expressed in 1917, in his *New movement in painting:* ‘It stands to reason, that the new principle in painting will not remain valid for ever. When everything has been expressed on the level which painting as a plastic art has now attained, new aesthetic possibilities will proceed from it. They will enlarge

the field of expression and will move the human spirit in an upward direction.'[487] Van Doesburg's positive conclusion from these negative statements-the impossibility of constant equilibrium-is the following; 'Although there are no objective and absolute laws, independent from the ever deepening and changing vision (laws which, if they existed, would cause a stultifying dogma), no fundamental objective truths, no truth at all, still the specific gravity of our spirit has become computable.'[488] On this relative, but acceptable value 'De Stijl's' further efforts are based.

In this no man's land between speculative and Utopian universalism and its realization in the community of its own period, 'De Stijl's' principle of evolution may be recognised. Indeed, the speculative element prevailed in the first years of 'De Stijl's' existence, emphasized by Mondriaan and backed by the authority of Dr. Schoenmaekers' positive mysticism. Its dominance had to a certain extent estranged Oud from 'De Stijl'; it had, from the very beginning, repelled Van der Leck. This is still fairly obvious in 'De Stijl's' third manifesto of 1921 for instance, containing the following phrases: 'The international spirit is of an internal nature, it is inexpressible. It does not consist of words but of plastic deeds and of inner strength. Spiritual strength. Thereby the new world scheme is shaped.'[489] And also: 'Concentration and property, spiritual and material individualism were the foundations of the Old Europe. She has imprisoned herself in them and she cannot free herself any more. She is going to rack and ruin and we look on calmly. Even if we were able to help, we would not want to help. We do not want to prolong the life of this old whore. A new Europe has already begun to grow within us.'[490]. When comparing the general attitude of this manifesto with the fifth, published in 1923 and signed by Van Doesburg and Van Eesteren, the change in tone and in attitude will be immediately apparent: the opening and closing phrases of the manifesto are sufficiently characteristic: 'By means of collective work, we have examined architecture as a unity created by all the arts, by industry, by technique etc.... and we have determined that the consequences will bring forth a new style (.....). The period of destruction has come entirely to an end. A new period begins, one of construction.'[491] Indeed, the re-orientation of 'De Stijl' towards the realization and away from speculative universalism, was the result of the collaboration of Van Doesburg with Van Eesteren and Rietveld. We shall have to come back to its results, but its essential feature must be stressed here. Once Oud - who had always opposed Utopian theories in architecture - had left 'De Stijl', the re-orientation from Utopian speculation towards actual realization became, for a good deal, Van Eesteren's contribution. He, also, contributed to 'De Stijl's' work a new feature, which becomes apparent in the 1923 manifesto: the application of analysis and experiment as a contrast to aprioristic speculation, in other words, a different attitude towards the outer world. This new attitude and its importance to 'De Stijl's' achievement must not be underrated. Van Doesburg, who had always been eager to realize, was the first to go ahead, with his characteristic enthusiasm and force, in the new direction.

The desire to achieve in the present surroundings, to be 'modern' instead of

'universal', induced a sharp polemic accent against the remnants of tradition. Van Doesburg voices it clearly: 'The old culture, the culture of Jean Jacques Rousseau, the culture of the heart, the uncultured culture of a petit-bourgeois intelligentia and its hairy apostles, Morris and Ruskin; the concentric culture, the culture of "I" and "mine" is not yet completely a corpse.'[492] He is aware that a possible change has to emanate from society and that a style, a general realization of plastic principle, will only be possible in a form of society, which has a common spiritual depth: 'The aesthetic deficiency is rooted in the whole construction of a society, which began by denying the spirit. We are aware that only one radical improvement is possible, i.e. the destruction of this individualist form of society. Through this it would be possible once again for art to become an organic part of life. If everything in our life would take on an aesthetic form, on a universal base, man would of course grow up from the cradle surrounded by beauty and style.'[493] And to this criticism of the present situation, he opposes another vision of the future - but not a Utopian vision: 'This manifestation is the plastic expression of a principle of life which is dormant in everybody, based on the abolition of a classical and historical duality. The mathematical development of modern society, which is still in its dynamic stage, is subject to the same conception of life. The increasing generalisation of life, prepared by the old culture, will - guided by the new experiences - produce economic relations which will make it possible to realize communally and plastically the new conception of life. This will be the foundation of a new plastic culture.' [494] He had worded this idea already in the first volume of *De Stijl*: 'Neo-plasticism will be proved fit to merge into the whole body of the new society. Thus it will be more closely connected with man than was the old representation of the appearances.'[495] But the new society for Van Doesburg is not Utopia, it is the form of society, of which he sees the first offspring in his own period. In their further growth he has every possible confidence. The style he aims at is to be the expression of this new - and more enlightened - period: 'Style means: to contemplate truth calmly. The unrest of this era is characteristic of a period which precedes a new style (therefore we can perceive the beginning of a new style in work which shows repose in movement). As the future style will be principally determined by psychic cubism (neo-plasticm), we have (.....) to develop our new consciousness from this (.....) artistic expression.'[496] It is clear from his passage, that the new form of aesthetic expression, which is neo-plasticism, has been a starting point for Van Doesburg, in order to realize his aesthetic principles by a materialisation more deeply anchored in reality than his painting could give. So he turns to architecture and explains his views in an article, which he has given the characteristic title: 'From new aesthetics to material realization.'[497]

By this new conception, which puts every emphasis on the achievements, on the artist's practical activity and much less on his contemplative faculties, the task of the artist has indeed been changed. Van Doesburg wrote of this evolution: 'What is happening in architecture and in the renovation of our homes, has already been prepared for a considerable time by the plastic arts; but every-

thing formerly developed in the isolation of the studio, is now realized in public, in the streets, and in our immediate surroundings. This is indeed a proof of my theory, evolved in 1916 already: that every work of art formulates a claim which will be realized in life sooner or later. This is the educating and creative force of a work of art.'[498] The artist therefore helps to realize the social system of the future. Van Doesburg sees the essential task of the artist thus: to express the need of mankind, which will be satisfied by the development of the social system, and to satisfy these needs directly by the realization of a brighter, better environment for man: 'The new culture is revealed by a few. They are the heralds of a new world, a new period. Appearance is replaced by essence. Vagueness becomes distinctness, shade becomes colour. Illusionary space becomes space. Illusionary depth, real depth. Emotion becomes consciousness. Passion becomes reason. War becomes law. Nature becomes style.'[499] The artist is the forerunner of human society, as the artist is capable of expressing the needs and the desires which others definitely feel without being able to express them: 'The new culture, which is only vaguely present in the masses as yet, is enlightenment in a few persons, artists and thinkers. They have brought it to its logical expression.'[500]

There is another passage in Van Doesburg's writings, which expresses this conception even more clearly: '...that the artists are the organs of humaniry (not of the masses), that it has always been and will always be the artists who have quickened the latent needs of humanity, by presenting them plastically.'[501]

The artist, to Van Doesburg and to 'De Stijl' is therefore more than the craftsman or the artisan, who produces upon explicit commission. It is his task to feel the needs of society, to answer the as yet unasked questions. It is the same thought which Lissitzky formulated when writing about his artistic conception, 'Proun': 'It is the strength of the Proun to set forth aims. In this fact the freedom of the artist in opposition to science exists.'[502]

Indeed, it had hitherto never been the artist's task to produce the aim: his was only to demonstrate and to comment aims which had been set by others. But in the history of human civilisation many examples are known of aims, which had not yet been formulated by general consciousness, by public opinion, but which nevertheless were urged for the common benefit. Vaccination, compulsory education, present-day hygiene are examples of this kind of need, formulated and achieved by a few persons, who were aware of these needs ahead of time. A similar role is allotted to the artist by Van Doesburg's and 'De Stijl's' far-sighted conception: they were aware of the need for the well-organized and bright environment for mankind, which technical development had made possible. They were aware of this need before it had made itself felt to the majority of their contemporaries. But the latter fact did not release them from completing this task: on the contrary, it became even more urgent owing to the opposition, shown by their contemporaries.

Plastic art had therefore been given the task of consciously assisting in the moulding of the face of its epoch. And this task implied very important moral values. Van Doesburg writes about them to Anthony Kok: 'I still am convinced

that art is an independent element, an independent force, which is ethical as well as aesthetical in its display. Practice tells me so. De Boer wrote me repeatedly that he had observed that peoples's faces had lighted up, so to speak, when they passed coloured houses and that they were filled with a joyful feeling. I am convinced that the moral worth of man will increase in a properly solved environment.'[503] At that time, in 1922, Van Doesburg had already been trying to build up this new environment.

The difference between Van Doesburg's and Mondriaan's conception of the task of art is therefore greater than it may appear at first sight. Yet both trends, by their mutual influence, brought about the results of 'De Stijl'. Without Mondriaan's speculative conception, on which neo-plasticism was based, the results in painting would never have been attained. But without Van Doesburg's principle of the active task of art in society, neo-plasticism might, in fact, have remained an isolated experiment in painting without any consequences, without any realization in contemporary architecture and without any influence on the 'face of society'. In order to gain a clearer definition of Van Doesburg's aim, we must be permitted to quote a few more passages from his writings.

One of the fundamental passages, published in *De Stijl* runs thus: 'Art is, like science and technique, a method of organising life in general. We have come to the conclusion that art in our day ceases to be a dream, in an opposing direction to the actual world; that it ceases as well to be a means for discovering cosmic secrets. Art is an overall and real expression of creative energy, which organizes the progress of human life, i.e. it is a tool of the general process of labour.'[504] And in a similar context, Van Doesburg defines what he means by 'creative': 'That which in its consequences essentially changes real life (including the discovery of or the invention of new materials). Every object is a claim. In opposition to an application of given results, without the setting up of new claims, without the realizing of new possibilities.'[505] The difference between this conception and Mondriaan's is indeed great. According to Van Doesburg's point of view, art is concerned, not with leading the way for humanity, but - quite practically - with making its road. It is the task of art, to create the environment of man, to build up his surroundings. This may - once again - be a Dutch conception, but it is striking that the term 'work of art' (kunstwerk) is applied in Dutch not only to the result of artistic creation, but also to the constructions wrought by engineers, such as bridges, sluices etc. The significance of Van Doesburg's conception is summed up in a passage in *De Stijl*: 'Gradually the old dream of primitive man becomes reality: to be the master of his surroundings.'[506]

For this domination of man's surroundings, of nature, a working method is required and 'De Stijl' has found this method in abstraction. Van Eesteren - whose importance in this context is not to be underrated, as we shall see - has worded this conception as follows: 'Without this abstract reality (mental image) it is impossible to attack and to dominate existing reality (speculation, prejudice, laziness, etc.).'[507] This theory is based on the perception, that human activity and human spirit have always used the mental image, in order to attain an aim,

whereas in nature the so-called mental image, the goal of evolution, has only been presupposed, or even substituted, by man. The mental image, the intellectual abstraction, is therefore a characteristic feature of human activity and as such, opposed to nature. Van Doesburg gives a striking example of this opposition on which he bases his conception: 'A flight by airplane can convince one of the great difference in method between nature and human spirit, when one compares countryside and town. Wherever human spirit has intervened, as in the latter case, a totally different order reigns, based on totally different laws and expressing itself in entirely different forms, colours, lines and tension. Equally contrasting, equally hostile as the relation of town to countryside, is the relation of the structure of the human spirit to the structure of nature. The spirit is the natural enemy of nature (paradoxical as this may sound), though there need not be the question of a dualism.'[508] 'De Stijl's' conception of a realizatian in human surroundings has been based on the acknowledgement of these facts and on the analysis of the laws of human thought.

This view of the method and the task of art is, in consequence, quite different from Mondriaan's conception: it is neither speculative, nor aprioristic. To speculation, to a universalist mysticism, the new trend of 'De Stijl' opposes a fresh method: experience. The essential document of this re-orientation is an article *Towards a collective construction* by Van Doesburg and Van Eesteren: 'We have to understand that art and life are no longer two separate domains. This is why the idea of "art" as an illusion separated from real life must disappear. The word "art" no longer means anything to us. Instead thereof, we demand the construction of our surroundings according to creative laws, resulting from a stable principle. These laws, parallel to those of economy, mathematics, technique, hygiene, etc., will lead to a new plastic unity. In order to define the relations of these reciprocal laws, it becomes necessary to understand and to determine them. Until now the domain of human creation and its constructive laws have never been examined scientifically. It is impossible to regard these laws as imaginary. They exist. One can only define them by collective work and by experience (.....). Our epoch is hostile to every subjective speculation in art, science, technique, etc. The new spirit, which already governs almost all modern life, is opposed to animal spontaneousness (lyricism), to nature's domination, to artistic flummery and cookery. In order to construct a new object we need a method, that is to say, an objective system. If one finds, in different objects, identical qualities, one has found an objective standard.'[509]

This re-orientation of 'De Stijl's' towards the achievement in the immediate surroundings of an objective rule, is to a great extent the work of Van Eesteren; in his collaboration with Van Doesburg, he always found Van Doesburg eager to achieve and test his achievement against existing reality. But the method of this new form of realization is due to Van Eesteren's realistic and scientific approach to nature: a healthy dash of nominalism had been added to the universalist conception of 'De Stijl'. Since Van Eesteren's membership, reproductions of engineering works became more frequent in *De Stijl's* pages, the admiration for the severe and objective beauty of bridges, hangars and similar constructions

increases and the aesthetic principle, in its universal sense, is less emphasized. Van Eesteren did not easily find the words to express his ideas; he expressed them, however, in collaboration with Van Doesburg, who became a protagonist of this movement, which tallied so well with his desire for achievement. And even Mondriaan was, to some extent, convinced: his later writings in the years between 1927 and 1933 show an advance towards this standpoint: in his last years only he consciously reverts, once again, to a more speculative universalism. There is a definite change in the content of the review *De Stijl* after 1922, though: the 6th volume has a different key-note. It is not exaggerating to attribute this changed attitude to the membership of Van Eesteren.

The most important feature of this re-orientation is the emphasis on the need to build an environment suitable for modern man and to build it in a way, independent of nature, obeying only the laws of human intelligence. Or, as Van Doesburg expressed it by opposing the past: 'All preceding systems thought to be able to neutralize the enmity between organic nature and human intelligence, either by an interval, or by equilibrated relationship.'[510] This passage is to some extent directed again at Mondriaan's idea: 'Culture transforms feeling and therefore nature as well; it brings about unity between the spirit and nature.'[511] Mondriaan though, had written in the same context: 'Culture therefore stands more or less in opposition to nature, as the universal is opposed to the individual.'[512] It is only in his booklet *Art and life* (1931) that Mondriaan stresses more than before the active capacity of human intelligence to transform the surroundings of man: 'It is evident that during the whole of its evolution the human rhythm will oppose the outward natural rhythm and this is the more so according to man's own progressing. Therefore it is logical that man has transformed as far as he has been able, the natural aspect and the natural life in order to create a rhythm outside of himself. This effort can be retraced in art and to some extent it accounts for the imperious necessity of the transformation, it has been submitting the natural aspect and the particular form to, though be it in an abstract and free domain. But it is of even far greater importance that man should transform the rhythm of life of which he participates.'[513] And in the same context: 'Because concrete life is "real" to us, it is logical that the expression of plastic art is becoming more and more "real" too. At the very least however, we ought to conceive this reality in art as a reproduction of the aspect of the reality surrounding us: we ought to see it as a reality created by man. Thence we understand that the expression of art, whilst getting more and more abstract from the point of view of nature, is growing more and more concrete from the standpoint of art. Art will neither meddle nor make with the natural appearance any longer, no more than with the vague sentiment on the cultivating of which man used to be so extremely keen. Art constructs, composes, realizes. The expression of art follows the trend of life, and not that of nature.'[514]

Mondriaan's striving for a realisation of these principles still appears somewhat remote and airy, whereas Van Doesburg emphasizes and realizes its actual and practical aspect: 'Too long the idea, approved by everyone, has dominated man, that the artist, as a kind of savage, should live separate from the world, in

order to produce, in self-centred egoism and under the spell of the fear of life, works of art which stand apart from life. We have entered a new period, in which the artist, along with his aesthetic task, obeys an educational and social vocation. The artist shares in the culture. He shapes it.'[515] And it is the educational task to which Mondriaan as well, gives his attention: 'Due to man's present inequality, the one of us suffers from the other. Nothing but the development, education and cultivation of mankind can deliver us from this affliction.'[516]

Van Doesburg had already voiced his confidence in the possibility of improving human conditions today, when he wrote in the first volume of *De Stijl:* 'So neo-plasticism is the first manifestation of a frank, sincere, but in the first place logical attitude of the new humanity towards life, which, excluding individualism as a system of living, will therefore not suffer from the consequences of this sentimental system.'[517] And Mondriaan's conclusion, which seems similar, but is, in fact quite different in its tendency, is the following: 'The consistent assertion of this artistic expression can be nothing but its realization in our tangible surroundings. For the time will come when, owing to the changed demands of life, "painting" will be dissolved in it.'[518]

Van Doesburg's - and therefore De Stijl's desire for achievement sometimes goes so far, that he considers interest in art as a danger, as it is liable to oppose the concentration on life and on the active task of the artist and of all other human beings. A passage from the 6th volume of *De Stijl* is typical: 'As scientific progress has been hampered before, in the Middle Ages, by religion and its official representatives, the development of real life is nowadays hampered by art. The place formerly taken by religion, is now taken by art. Art has poisoned our life. Aestheticism has infected everyone (alas, ourselves as well). You cannot touch an object without its being contaminated with art. (.....) Let us refresh ourselves with things which are not art. (.....) Men do still exist, who are capable of making beautiful things without art. These are the progressive minds. But they are hampered by art-parsons, their ingenuity is paralyzed by art. For the sake of progress we ought to suppress every notion of "art", every aesthetical speculation.'[519] These almost iconoclast lines are inspired by his admiration for the creations of engineers and the respect he paid to their social function. And at the same time these lines throw a bright light on the difference between Van Doesburg's and Mondriaan's views: where, to Mondriaan, art becomes irrelevant before the universal idea, to Van Doesburg it was to make room for progress, that is to say, man's self-styled evolution. Van Doesburg's view of art as a danger is still more revealed by an earlier passage, where he quotes Otto Flake: 'Art is dying, as religion has died,' and continues: 'Indeed, art has said everything in individual form. It can only repeat itself, as it has formerly repeated nature. It has exhausted itself in intentional creation. Art, i.e. intentional creation, has outlived itself.' [520] It is indeed surprising to hear this downright denial of 'l'art pour l'art' from somebody who had started out from the further-most consequence of this principle. But he-and 'De Stijl' - have developed this principle to such an extreme, that an 'engagement' of art again presents itself; the cause in which 'De Stijl' was prepared to engage itself, was human progress,

the improvement of human life. This new attitude is reflected in the following lines: ‘The time of abstraction has passed. Is not an elementary painting, that is a definite,by itself organic composition of flat colours, much more concrete than a similar composition, veiled by the illusion of a natural and organic form? (.....) Abstract is as a matter of fact, only what happens within the isolation of our thought(.....). Abstract and real are relative, if not changing notions.’[521]

The tendency of ‘De Stijl’ to serve human progress has not only been expressed by Van Doesburg. Huszar also, writes in the first volume of the review: ‘He (the plastic specialist) does not want to sit dreaming in his studio any longer, but he demands through his work an active part in society.’[522] And Van Doesburg resumes the parallel expression of his friends by writing: ‘The great struggle, which starts with elementarism, consists of the following: to abolish completely the illusionist conception of life in all its forms (religion, anaesthesia by nature or by art, etc.) and to build, at the same time, an elementary world of exact and splendid reality.’[523] To this end, the existing pattern of outward truth was to be changed entirely, all the arts were to perform their task communally, to create a new form of human environment: ‘By a consistent pursuit and development of this complementary union of architecture and painting, it will be possible, in the future, to realize on a purely modern foundation the aims of monumental art; to place man amid(instead of opposite to) plastic art, thereby letting him take part in it.’[524]

In view of this violent attack on Jean Jacques Rousseau, it becomes clear in which direction Van Doesburg sought to realize his - and ‘De Stijl's’ - conception: the road led in the opposite direction of Rousseau's ‘Back to nature’; it had been indicated by a peremptory demand, away from nature. ‘Matter is transformed, denaturalized, by modern technique. The forms, which spring from this process, thus entirely lack the rural features of ancient forms. On this de- or rather transnaturalization, the style of our period is based.’[525] Mondriaan, in his later essays, has employed the same term and he has underlined the fact of the denaturalization of modern life by means of examples: ‘As denaturalisation is the principal point in human evolution, it is also most essential in neo-plastic art. The important fact about this art is that it has plastically demonstrated the necessity of denaturalisation. Neo-plastic painting has denaturalized the means of expression as well as its composition. That is why it is, indeed, abstract painting. Denaturalisation means abstraction. By abstraction one arrives at pure abstract expression. Denaturalisation means deepening. Denaturalisation is reached consciously or unconsciously. An example of the latter may be seen in the progress of fashion; not only do we see that the forms of dresses are becoming purer, but that they come into opposition to nature as well. And facial make-up shows an aversion to the natural skin.’[526] Mondriaan's conclusion, in this article of 1927, comes down to the following: ‘Man has a rhythm of his own. He opposes it to nature, and creates an environment of his own - in opposition to nature.’[527] And he sums up the outcome of this tenet in the following lines: ‘The more man ripens, the more he will become a “creator” and the more he will oppose natural matter and those, who are still dominated by it.

He will select his own surroundings and create them. He will therefore not regret the lack of nature, as the masses do, who have been forced in spite of themselves to leave it (.....). He will build cities, hygienic and beautiful by a balanced contrast of buildings, constructions and empty space. Then he will be quite as happy indoors as outdoors.'[528]

These passages show that Mondriaan has accepted the later development of 'De Stijl', but he has not gone as far as Van Doesburg, who has built his conception of art's task on this attack on nature: 'We are convinced, that it is a feature of "high culture", when these organic functions are transformed into mechanical functions and already we look down more or less on those, who function in a completely organic, natural way. This contempt is chiefly incurred by their complete unity with organic nature; what we miss in "natural" man is opposition, contrast, resistance, struggle or in a single word: spirit (.....), we see that the human spirit has a totally different structure and that in the general aspect of life's technique (formerly called drama) nature now can only be considered as a contrast and not an opposition to the spirit.'[529]

But Mondriaan, in his booklet *Art and life* (1931) scores an important point: he stresses, in this context, the significance of the straight line and its relation to the aims of 'De Stijl': 'In nature, these undulations manifest themselves i.e. we detect them after having thrown a stone in a pond, in the transverse section of a tree trunk, etc. The cadence of straight lines in rectangular opposition, however, has to be created by man.'[530] By these lines he emphasizes 'De Stijl's' works and ideas as a mode of expression for man, deliberately in opposition to nature. This opinion is shared by other artists of 'De Stijl', we need only quote Vantongerloo: 'Knowledge unveils the mystery; today men of science are agreed that the imitation of nature does not lead us far. Examples are numerous: a modern airplane is far from being an imitation of a large bird.'[531] And another, very important passage in the same book: 'The abstract road owes its eternity to evolution and if man had preferred to substitute the path of nature, we would still be running about naked and sleeping in the open (.....). The meter, the second, mathematics, etc., are abstractions which have enabled us to develop materially. Our conception would be sterile, if we did not know how to materialize what we feel. And we can only realize our feelings, or conceptions through abstraction.'[532] From this excerpt it may be seen, that abstraction had indeed become an attitude towards life.

A closer consideration of this attitude will remove any surprise, that the artists of 'De Stijl' were attracted by machinery. On the contrary, we have already attempted to point out the importance of technical development as regards the birth of 'De Stijl'. But in a later phase of its development, this attraction gains a greater importance for, then, 'De Stijl' is more concerned with achievement. It is once more Van Doesburg who characterizes the importance of machinery, the new mode of expression: 'If it is true that culture, in the widest sense, means independence from nature, we ought not to be surprised that the machine takes a principal part in the cultural desire for style. The machine, more than anything else, is the phenomenon of spiritual disci-

pline. Materialism, as a conception of life and art has considered handicraft as a direct mental expression. The new spiritual conception of art has not only been sensible of the beauty of the machine, but it has immediately acknowledged its infinite expressive possibilites in art. For a style, the task of which no longer exists in the creation of individual details such as single pictures, ornaments or private homes, but whose attack embraces - according to the economic circumstances - whole districts, sky-scrapers, airports, construction by means of handicraft is out of the question. Only the machine is adequate here; handicraft corresponds to mainly individual conception of life, left behind by evolution (.....). The application of machinery to artistic aims should be guided by the artistic spirit. In consequence of the spiritual and practical demands of our period, constructive distinctness has become a condition. Only machinery can achieve this distinctness. The new possibilities of machinery have brought forth an aesthetic value, typical of our time, which I have characterized as "mechanical aesthetics." [533] These mechanical aesthetics sometimes produce a marked preference of "De Stijl" for engineering works etc. as compared to works of art. This conception is most important as well for the evolution of industrial design, a branch of artistic expression by which Van Doesburg felt attracted because of its distinct opposition to "decorative art": "It is remarkable, that the essentially new manifests itself most purely in simple objects of daily use and in the general aspects of life; there it appears without deliberate intent or consideration of a human sentimental nature"[534]. This preference for the objective realization commences to point to functionalism, which is closely linked with what Van Doesburg had termed "mechanical aesthetics." A passage written by Severini, in the fifth volume of *De Stijl* only emphasizes this fact; "All the elements of matter, which compose a motor for instance, are arranged by a single will, i.e. the inventor's (.....). The process of construction of a machine is analogous to the process of construction of a work of art."[535] This idea of an objective and almost scientific construction of a work of art, which finds its example in the later paintings of Van Doesburg, has another consequence: the increasing importance of precision. It is Vordemberge-Gildewart - the only "Stijl" painter who had not had a more or less naturalistic past but started immediately from abstract construction - who voiced this contention in *De Stijl*: In spite of all the fuss and the defence of the problem of mechanics, I note, that the most important and essential point has been left out of the reckoning and remained un-observed: the abolition of chance (whereby the way has been cleared to liberated material). The "individual" temper and the charming way of adoration for persons, both elements alien to art, have thus been excluded once and for all.'[536] Mondriaan, as well, approaches the problem, though from a different angle; in his booklet *Art and Life* he writes about the need for precision: 'Although new morality and reason are able to guide us and art is capable of going ahead, we have to insist that "relation" is the first thing and that New Life is created by those very qualities, which are apparently but simple and insignificant factors, though virtually of the utmost importance. Let us mention for instance the value of exactitude and neatness, as they are shown to us by New Art, proving thus

the possibility of their being extant in life. Notwithstanding the fact that exactitude and neatness of execution always realize the work in all art, in New Art these qualities not only reach their pitch of perfection, but moreover, here they are conceived in quite a different way as they were in the past. In spite of all precision, everything was confounded in past art. In New Art however, everything shows itself in a clear way: neutral forms, planes, lines, colours, relations. It has been by its neatness and exactitude of execution that New Art has established in a real way the mutual equality of composition: the equilibrium. As to life, this fact shows us the great truth that the new forms and the mutual relations have no real value but for their being realized in an exact and precise way. Exactitude is one of the most urgently needed instruments as to the realization of the New Life.'[537]

For Mondriaan these thoughts and similar ones which he has formulated in *Art and Life*, were the ultimate conclusions of what he had written in 1918: 'Among the things to be demonstrated in regard to neo-plasticism, the reasonableness of neo-plasticism stands in the first place. For it is, above all, the reasonableness of a thing that modern man demands. The reasonableness of neo-plasticism as an art in general should be clear to him, but he ought also to be aware of its reasonableness as the art of our time.'[538]

To Van Doesburg it was principally his desire for realization and his ardent interest in all the spheres of human life, his social concern, which urged him to emphasize practical achievement: 'The artists ought to take care not to follow the leaders, but to show the masses that society today needs art, which is clear lawful and sane. The masses ought to be made aware of the unhealthy features of the bourgeois art. In the society of the future the people should demand our art, in other words we should have our share in the people, and the people in us.'[539] Inspired by these lofty, exalted feelings and, as always, eager to realize his conceptions, Van Doesburg took up architecture; he was conscious of the fact that architecture was the obvious way of influencing human life directly. He was however, well aware that a task of this importance would exceed everyone's power: 'As to accomplishing the tasks set by contemporary life, the initiative of the individual is no longer sufficient. Collective collaboration is a practical necessity.'[540] This passage dates from the year, that he started his collaboration with Van Eesteren, the practical results of which we will review in the ensueing pages. Their efforts were based on the principle of neo-plasticism, but equally and to a considerable extent, on what Oud had already done in the first years of 'De Stijl' when the latter still participated in its activity. Oud had written about the aim of this architecture as follows: 'Its aim has therefore been to realize an architecture, which belongs to its period, and would adapt itself and its forms to the modern expressions of life; an architecture from which a new style could spring through its unity with its surroundings. A programme therefore, which is as actual today as it was then.'[541]

This conception was the base of Van Doesburg's architectural ambition, evidence of which - though indirect - may be found already in the first volume of *De Stijl*: 'Architecture, more than any other branch of art, is linked up with

economic relations; as this connection makes itself felt so earnestly in our time and manifests itself in standardisation and provisional architecture, it is of very great importance to pay attention to construction (.....). The architect of today more than ever stands among the people. He is more than ever united with their soul. If he really has social feeling, he will put away his personal preference and choice and try to create building units with the existing materials, such as concrete, iron, stone, glass; units, which satisfy the needs of the people in the practical, hygienic as well as the aesthetic sense.'[542] It is therefore quite logical, that the main accent of 'De Stijl' activity shifted to architecture, as being the realization of its ambitions, but it is logical as well, that this change was only possible after the definite establishment of neo-plasticism in painting, that is to say, in 1920. Until this date all 'De Stijl' painters were too absorbed by the solution of the pictorial problem. Van der Leck only had taken a few steps in the field of interior decoration with his project for a room in 1917. The three original 'Stijl' architects however, Oud, Van 't Hoff and Wils, had drifted more or less away from 'De Stij'; Oud in 1920, the two others already in 1919. This estrangement did not find its cause in a divergence of artistic aim; it can be motivated more precisely by personal disagreement and by the concentration of 'De Stijl' on pictorial problems, which were, at that time, strongly dominated by Mondriaan's universalist conception. So the architectural activity of 'De Stijl' in its first years has been discussed in the preceding chapter, dealing with the origin of the movement. The importance of the first architectural achievements has been weighed up there; the effect they have had on European architecture will be examined in the following chapter.

Oud had, in 1921 already, foreseen the architecture of the future. In a lecture on 'Future architecture', delivered in February 1921, therefore after leaving 'De Stijl', he said: 'Summing up, it may be concluded that a new art of building, rationally basing itself on modern living conditions, will form a contrast in every respect to the present-day art of building. Without taking to an arid rationalism, it will, before all else, be efficient, but it will also be immediately inspired by a higher sense of aesthetics. It will be the sharpest possible contrast to the non-technical shape- and colourless products of the present-day inspiration, as we know it; it will accomplish the task it has been set, in complete submission to its aim, in an almost impersonal, technically expressive manner, in organisms of clear shape and pure proportion (.....). The tendencies of the architectural development therefore point to an art of building which is essentially more bound to matter than formerly; but it will in appearance rise above it. It will develop, free from all manifestation of impressionism, in the fullness of light, to a purity of proportion, a fairness of colour, and an organic clearness of form, surpassing classical purity by its absence of all accidental circumstances.'[543]

And Van Doesburg too, wrote - in 1919 - the following lines, when discussing the summer-house of Van 't Hoff in *De Stijl*: '...the rational, intentional solution of functional parts determines its plasticity, and the mutual relations of the masses. The house thus achieves harmony in itself. It forms a contrast with

nature.'[544] These lines are an almost accurate description of the houses he was to design more than four years later.

In 1924 he defines the new architecture which he had realized in the meantime, as follows: 'The base for the healthy development of architecture and of art in general is the subdueing of any indication of form in the sense of a preconceived type. Instead of using earlier types of style as a pattern, thus imitating former styles, it is necessary to set the problem of architecture wholly anew. New architecture is elementary, that is to say, it develops from the elements of building, in the widest sense. These elements, i.e. function, mass, plane, line, space, light, colour, material, etc., are at the same time elements of plastic expression. New architecture is economic, that is, it organizes its elementary means as efficiently and economically as possible, without any waste of means or material. New architecture is functional, that is to say it develops from the precise definition of practical requirements, fixed on a clear ground plan. New architecture is shapeless and yet distinctive, that is to say it ignores any preconceived aesthetical scheme, any form, in the sense of pastry-cooks, in which it casts its functional space, i.e. the sum of practical living conditions (.....).'[545]

New architecture, as Van Doesburg describes it, has sprung from neo-plasticist painting: 'Only in our time the leading art - painting - has ever indicated the way which architecture has to go in order to materialize like painting and sculpture, in a mechanical and disciplined manner, what already exists imaginatively (aesthetically) in the other arts. It should not amaze anyone, that the art which from the beginning of the 20th century, had led the way, i.e. painting, has *a posteriori* created an ideal aesthetic value.'[546]

This boils down to the same thing Mondriaan wrote when looking back over this period: 'In our time there exists a tendency to suppress aesthetic feelings. Nevertheless these are essential in order to guide any realization, so that our physical and normal needs may be satisfied. A new aesthetic for our actual environment, which exerts such a profound influence on our mentality, can be deduced from the principles of pure plastic expression in art. In the future, the realization of pure plastic expression in palbable reality will replace the work of art.'[547] These lines however, were still influenced by Mondriaan's Utopian conception, whereas Van Doesburg realized his conception in his own, and not in a future environment. But Mondriaan had already indicated the direction in an article in the third volume of *De Stijl*: 'Architecture has only to realize in tangible reality what painting has demonstrated abstractly in neo-plasticism. It is the architect and the engineer who are in the future to create for us a harmony between ourselves and our surroundings (.....). What surrounds us now? We live as strangers in someone else's house; with someone else's furniture, carpets, vessels, paintings. When we walk through the streets these too, are someone else's. When we go to the theatre, there, as well are others. The Cinema? With its antiquated morals on one hand, and its "nature" on the other? It is not of our time either.'[548] New architecture's primary ambition however, was to be of its period and to express this period frankly and sincerely. And 'De Stijl's' period, the era between the two wars, aimed at object-

ivity and efficiency and claimed the same qualities for architecture. Mondriaan stressed this fact in the essay he wrote for the 1938 exhibition of abstract art in Amsterdam: 'Therefore it is such a joyful fact, that modern rational architecture, urged by the practical demands of this period, and led by new material, has almost excluded the expression of subjective sentiment. Though it cannot be for practical and financial reasons an "art", yet it is much closer to the realization of a universal artistic expression than the "art of building" was in former times. For, considered from an aesthetical point of view, it has now become the pure manifestation of spacial relations.'[549]

Mondriaan, who was entirely absorbed in this conception of equilibrium, did perhaps not fully appreciate the constructive base of 'De Stijl's' new architectural trend, but rightly he emphasized its source in painting: 'As neo-plasticism is the realization of the principles of neo-plastic painting in whatever surrounds us by way of constructions, it already implies the beginning of the accomplishing in life of a more universal order. Therefore neo-plasticism is of cultural importance. For its realization in matter is convincing.'[550]

But he still projects its definite outcome into the future: 'As our time is not yet ripe for amalgamating the whole of architecture, as neo-plasticism is still to be achieved in painting, these facts must be of importance to today's abstract-real art. Each artist is to find his way of manifestation of colour, adapting himself to time and place. If he does not take into account today's surroundings, his work will give an unharmonic effect, at least when it is not considered entirely by itself. However, this unharmonic effect will perhaps open the eyes to a vision of today's environment, as indeed it mostly appears in its traditional capriciousness.'[551]

The same projection into the future becomes clear from a letter by Mondriaan to Van Doesburg, written in 1922: 'I do entirely agree when you write that the interior is going to be "the" important thing. But in the future... I am convinced that we are now only capable of doing it on paper, on account of these rotten architects, valets of the public.'[552] And again in an article in 1927: 'In order to arrive at the creation of a new city, the new home will have to be created first. However, neo-plasticism considers the home not as a place for seclusion, a place to find a refuge in, but as part of the whole; as a constructive element of the city (...). It is precisely through fear of disharmony and through adapting the past, that progress is insufficient in our days. One should not adapt, one should create.'[553]

Mondriaan indeed did not deny his ideas: he lived in his studio, which was entirely designed by him in accordance with his plastic principles. These lines however, bring up the whole problem of the realization of interior design. 'De Stijl' had already been concerned with this problem in its early years: Van der Leck and Huszar had designed interiors as from 1917 and 1918 on; cf. the apartment of Til Brugman in The Hague. But Mondriaan, in his uncompromising way, goes further, at least theoretically: he claims the exclusive importance of the interior: 'The question would be solved even better if one no longer made individual paintings! If people, who felt attracted towards neo-

plasticism, would have their interiors designed accordingly, the neo-plastic painting could vanish gradually. Neo-plasticism is even more really alive when "around" us. In execution, both a painting and an interior are equally difficult.'[554]

Van Doesburg is less concerned with the future. When he writes about the interior in *De Stijl*, he discusses an existing example, the interior designed by Huszar in The Hague in 1921. And as we have seen before, he emphasizes the moral properties of the new architectural conception: 'The effect of colours in their spacial relation, the unity between furniture, curtains, carpets, have been so harmoniously balanced against one another in the execution, that the resulting effect is not only aesthetical, but ethical as well.'[555] But in the same lecture he strongly opposes the intentional creation of beauty, emphasizing at the same time the beauty of utilitarian production, where the urge towards beauty plays but an unimportant part. The objects which are used in daily life are to determine the aspect of the homes to be designed; about these objects and their unintentional beauty he writes as follows: 'No decoration, nothing that is superfluous, nothing that is artistic in the sense of accent on beauty, which has been added from the outside, after the completion. But only the sincerity of the object by itself. Above all, truth, function, construction, and no defects caused by individualist reflection.'[556] From this conception springs his high praise for Rietveld's furniture: 'This piece of furniture answers, by its novel form, the question as to which part sculpture is to play in the new interior. Our chairs, tables, cupboards and other objects of use are the "abstract-real" sculptures in our future interior. As to its construction, Mr. Rietveld wrote us the following lines: With this chair an attempt has been made to have every part be quite simple, that is to say in the most primary form in accordance with the nature of the function and with the material, the form, therefore, which is most susceptible in attaining harmony in relation to the rest. The construction assists in connecting the parts themselves, without any mutilation, in such a way that one does not dominatingly cover the other, or that one is subordinate to the other; thus the whole thing stands freely and clearly in space and the form stands out from the material.'[557]

So interior decoration and furniture are one of the first lines in which 'De Stijl' realized itself. Rietveld must be considered the pioneer here. His designs of furniture are indeed the first actual realization of 'De Stijl's' ideas. Therefore the importance of his chairs and other objects cannot easily be overrated. His[+] first armchair, dating from 1917, has been reproduced in *De Stijl's* second volume (Pl. 22) as the first example of furniture made according to the principles of[+] 'De Stijl' and reproductions of the sideboard and the other armchair follow in the third volume (Pl. 7). These first pieces of furniture are all the more important as they have demonstrated that the principles of 'De Stijl' were not only confined to the field of aesthetical speculation and to the somewhat remote art of painting, but that they could also be realized in objects pertaining to daily life. The historical significance of these works is therefore great indeed - quite apart from the fact that these early pieces of Rietveld's design show a simplicity and a purity which has not been surpassed in the course of later develop-

[+]*pl. 19* aant.

[+]*pl. 31* aant.

ment. They arouse in the spectator the immediate sensation of beholding a masterpiece: nothing could be added or substracted, or even changed in colour or shape - they are perfect in their simple and sober purity. As to their function: they are indeed perfect in another way. By their transparentness they do not obstruct space at all. As to the other function of a chair, the sitting accommodation, this seems indeed to be a denial of the universalist ambitions: sitting still seems to be such an extremely individual action, that Rietveld's chair is an ideal accommodation for some people, while most unpractical for others. However, the most important problem for 'De Stijl', the solution of the aesthetic problem of furniture in its relation to space, has been attained by Rietveld in a perfect and revolutionary way. Rietveld's interior (ill. *De Stijl* III, pl. 14) will be discussed simultaneously with his architectural achievements; besides, this design was not quite as completely detailed as 'De Stijl's' articles would have us believe. Huszar, in collaboration with Wils, designed a few interiors which are reproduced in the fifth volume of *De Stijl* (pp. 14, 15, 78); they all date from 1921, and show a consistent treatment of the interior as a spacial composition in colour and form. It is the conception which, after all, is typical of 'De Stijl': to give a definite shape to an interior without leaving anything to chance or to individual temperament.

Interior decoration has been one of the results of 'De Stijl's' desire for actual achievement; town planning was another one. Van 't Hoff had already hinted at the problem in the first volume of *De Stijl*: 'Owing to the existing conditions in towns, it is not possible for the new trend to realize anything or very little at the most. This trend can be brought forward in due course, through the construction of new towns or the expansion of existing ones; i.e. by the building of blocks of houses or isolated buildings. Architectural unity in an already existing town is impossible.'[558]

And Oud, in the same volume, arrives at about the same conclusion: 'Anarchism in the building trade by lack of aesthetic concern as well as by its over-emphasis, may be checked by an application in the best sense, of mass-production (.....). The architect will then act as stage-manager, who directs the different results of mass-production into an architectural unity: the art of relationship. For anyone, who still feels the need, there remains the possibility of indulging in his aesthetical passion by private building.'[559]

There are a few lines by Mondriaan as well, alluding to the problem: 'The work of art cannot at present but stand by itself. Of course, neo-plasticism may only be entirely realized in a quantity of buildings, as a town. But its rejection, for the reason that this is not possible today, is not justified.'[560]

But the essential contribution, theoretically as well as practically to 'De Stijl's' urbanism, is Van Eesteren's: 'All our modern big cities or industrial areas are chaotic. Instead of increasing the joy of living of the individual, the technique tends to smother it. Some architects understood this. They started to consider how this chaos could be overcome. They did not, in doing so, begin by thinking about the form of a town, but primarily tried to discover the reasons behind the origin of this chaos (.....). The modern town-planner therefore

occupies himself with giving shape to the town, to the increasing stretches of country that are built over, as symptoms and expressions of modern life. He acknowledges this freely. He is aware that the old form has got to give way. He has got hold of something positive of which he is convinced that it is better than the old form which has to disappear since it has been exhausted.'[561] Van Eesteren has delivered the proof of his ability to realize these ideas. He has done+ so, brilliantly, in his project for 'Unter den Linden' in Berlin, where the clear solution is the result of a profound analysis. He has done so more soberly in his project for solving the Rokin problem in Amsterdam where he has acknowledged the fact, that a change in the historic pattern of a town implies a different solution for its beauty. He is still doing so in planning the new quarters of Amsterdam and in his search for the answer to problems, created in an old town by modern life.

+*pl. 39*aant.

The main problem of 'De Stijl's' striving after realization however, was that of architecture itself. The artists of 'De Stijl', through bitter experience, had been made aware of the fact that the time had not yet come to build new districts or to plan a new town. In a letter, probably written in 1920, Oud writes to Van Doesburg: 'In the actual town there is no chance. Only in the isolated building we can be pure. This is rotten indeed, but it has been proved to me by the facts.'[562] The first isolated buildings of 'De Stijl' (the Katwijk house Allegonda by Oud and Kamerlingh Onnes, the two houses at Huis-ter-Heide by Van 't Hoff and the hotel at Woerden by Wils) have already been discussed in the+ preceding chapters, and the projects, such as Oud's esplanade architecture and+ his factory at Purmerend, have shown how closely architectural development was linked up with painting. These first manifestations had indicated the way in which 'De Stijl' was to continue. But for some years the architectural activity of 'De Stijl' was forced to the background, by its concentration on the problems of painting and by the fact the three original 'Stijl' architects had drifted apart. But the course had been set. Oud was to write in 1924 about this period: 'The importance of the new artistic movement is, that what it stood for is more striving for form than an already existent form.'[563] He had characterized its principles by writing: 'It may be said with certainty that the form of its appearance will not be based on the exterior features of old forms in appearance, but that it will grow from the essence of modern technique and modern society, because this has always been so. This is the reason why its character will be totally different from that of any preceding period of style. The modern architect should therefore, above all, be technically well prepared - or at least he should possess a pure notion of the technique of modern building - and have as well a profound knowledge of social conditions in the broadest sense.'[564] And Mondriaan had characterized the task of architecture when he wrote: 'It is the great task of architecture to present us perpetually with universal beauty in a clearly visible manner, thereby forming one whole with the arts of sculpture and painting.'[565]

+*pl. 24*aant.

+*pl. 30*aant.

But in spite of this clear knowledge, only a very few projects have been realized in these years. Rietveld had built a jewellers shop in Amsterdam (*De Stijl* V,

opp. p. 24) in 1922 which has, alas, been destroyed since and Oud's small[+] building for the overseer's office of 'Oud Mathenesse' dates of 1922 as well. The development of neo-plastic painting and of neo-plastic theory absorbed the artists of the group and Van Doesburg was more than occupied by the international contacts of 'De Stijl' and his lecturing tours to Belgium and Germany. It took several years before the realization of 'De Stijl' architecture came to light, but 1923 saw, simultaneously, four revolutionary manifestations of a new but already mature architecture. These were the project of a private[+] house, designed for the art dealer Leonce Rosenberg by Van Doesburg and Van Eesteren, with a model from the hand of Rietveld - Oud had been asked originally to design this house, but he had declined this commission, as there was no 'terrain' to build the house on, and Oud was opposed to 'Utopian building' which did not start from given facts; - the project for an artist's[+] house by the same team; the house of Mrs. Schröder at Utrecht by Rietveld,[+] and the project for a house on the river by Van Eesteren. A long period of collaboration between the three architects, especially between Van Doesburg and Van Eesteren, had preceded these sudden phenomena. It is essential to follow the development of this collective effort, as it is the basis of these results and the source of the architectural conception formulated in the manifesto *Towards collective construction* quoted above on p. 149. In short, the development of this collective work leads, in a series of fascinating drawings, ranging from Utopian to practicable architecture. The guiding principle of this development is the method of analysis, of experience, which van Eesteren's collaboration had introduced into 'De Stijl's' methods. The work starts with a study in space (repr. *De Stijl* 10th anniversary number, p. 111) in order to establish the spacial relations and laws of architecture. The following drawings, which are called 'scheme for an architecture', deal with the elaboration of the spacial relations. By this time the abstract analysis has already materialized as an architectural shape: it has come to distinctness. Yet, the drawings are still a study in abstract space and not in concrete dwelling space. The further analysis of the demands made by a special situation leads to a well-defined ground-plan and the ground-plan, in its turn, determines the spacial and plastic appearance of the house - in this case the model (*De Stijl* VI, opp. p. 84, verso). Seldom has a masterpiece of architecture been developed with so consistent an objectivity and such a clear insight in the complexity of the problem. In this communal effort, not only a house has been designed, but architecture as a whole has been rebuilt from its very foundations. It is difficult indeed to get a clear vision of the personal factors of this collaboration and it is perhaps even quite unimportant as the results, by themselves, are so extremely important. But is it by no means a coincidence, but indeed striking, that the adoption of a new method - analysis - coincides with Van Eesteren's joining 'De Stijl'. The new, scientific approach to architectural problems is indeed Van Eesteren's contribution to 'De Stijl' and this fact is again confirmed by a comparison of his method of designing the project for 'Unter den Linden'. There also, a[+] rigorous scientific analysis is applied to the problem and the solution has been

[+]pl. 24[aant.]

[+]pl. 40,41[aant. aant.]

[+]pl. 36,37[aant. aant.]

[+]pl. 38[aant.]

[+]pl. 39[aant.]

based on its results. Another aspect of this solution, however, is unquestionably due to Van Doesburg: the principle of architecture's need for colour. Van Doesburg had realized the use of colour in architecture as early as 1920, in Drachten, when he collaborated with De Boer. The project for the hall of a university (*De Stijl* VI, opp. p. 85), dating from 1923 also, has been solved in colour by Van Doesburg, in collaboration with Van Eesteren, who had designed the spacial aspect. There as well as in the artist's house, colour and architecture have truly been united. Colour has not, as in former buildings, been added to architecture, but both are quite inseparable: colour has become an architectural means of expression, through the effort and the experience of Van Doesburg. It is a great pity, that none of these three projects was ever executed.

The only two executed projects of this period are Rietveld's house at Utrecht and Van Eesteren's house at Alblasserdam. The last named has been so disfigured by use and by the war, that it is difficult to get a clear impression of its+ essential qualities. However, the plans demonstrate again how the analyses of space and of function +*pl. 38*aant. have led to a perfect equilibrium of composition. On the+ other hand, Rietveld's Utrecht house (*De Stijl* VI, p. 160) has recently been returned to its original state, +*pl. 36,37*aant. aant. so that all its qualities of balance and harmony stand out clearly. The most striking fact about the building is the unity between its interior and its exterior appearance: it does not have a façade, as all the three outer walls are faithful reflections of the organisation of the interior. And there, in the house, space has not been secluded or divided into compartments - the whole house is but one spacial unity. The bold manner in which constructive elements are brought into view and have been used in the visual composition, is as revolutionary as it is successful. Colour has been used here as well and it gives a bright and lively aspect to the house; it is a further experience, after Oud's and Van Doesburg's use of colour in a hostel in 1917. In opposition to the projects by Van Doesburg and Van Eesteren, the Rietveld house gives the impression of being not so much the result of long analysis and calculation, but the lucky result of an initial and daring attack on the problem. As with Rietveld's first chair, his first large construction bears all the marks of a perfect masterpiece: in its sober and radiant simplicity it attains perfection and complete beauty. And it has, through the whims of fate, the merit of being the first realized achievement of ‘De Stijl's’ new architectural trend.

In the following years only a few outstanding results can be cited: the interior of a doctor's house by Rietveld (*De Stijl* VI, opp. p. 40) in 1924; the façade of the restaurant ‘De Unie’ in Rotterdam by Oud, of 1925 now alas destroyed by the war; Oud's blocks in Hoek van Holland have been designed in 1924 and completed in 1927, - they still are a conspiciuous monument of ‘De Stijl's’ first architectural trend; and a work of a very transient nature: Kiesler's design of the theatre exhibition in 1925 (*De Stijl* VI, pp. 142, 143, 145, 147), an ingenious solution of a difficult spacial and constructive problem. The last important realization of ‘De Stijl's’ architectural conception is Van Doesburg's house at Meudon, on which work was started in 1929. It was completed

shortly before his death in 1931 (*De Stijl*, last number, pp, 38-44). This house shows a further development of the 1923 efforts towards greater simplicity and restfulness, as it is not the result of a first and complicated research for an architectural solution, but the consequence of ripened experience: the problematic features of the 1923 projects have disappeared, but the same spacial clearness and distinction is characteristic in this building as well. Van Doesburg had intended it as his studio, which was to be, at the same time, a centre for 'De Stijl's' collective activity. His death prevented the realization of this plan - but the house reminds us of Van Doesburg's clarity of vision and of his desire to accomplish which he realized in the last years of his life.

Each of the realizations of 'De Stijl' have been accompanied by a theoretical commentary. So have its architectural results. Van Eesteren characterized 'De Stijl's' new architectural trend when he wrote about the beauty of the modern city: 'The beauty which we can attain will be built on today's attitude of life, on its scale and dimensions.'[566] And Oud had already formulated in advance the principles of this architectural conception, which his colleagues started to realize in 1923: 'The subordination of the utilitarian to the idealistic aspect would be detrimental to the cultural and general values and would only hamper the striving for style. For the development of an architectural style, a good house (in the sense of technical and practical purity) is therefore of greater importance than a beautiful house.'[567] Van 't Hoff had already expressed a similar thought in the first volume of *De Stijl*: 'In order to attain a style in architecture, the art of building must reach complete technical perfection and every notion of "art" should, in connection with this development, be kept in the background.'[568] It was Van Doesburg who realized - by his experience as a painter - the synthesis of these two different trends: he did so practically in his collaboration with Van Eesteren, and theoretically in his writings, from which the following passage is a characteristic example in this context: The ideal aesthetics of one art realize themselves in the material of another; ideal and mechanical aesthetics, premeditated artistic expression and utilitarian construction unite in a perfect equilibrium. This equilibrium is 'style'.[570]

In architecture, therefore, 'De Stijl' artists have realized what they had conceived as a style; the union of artistic expression with utilitarian construction. But this definition cannot, without difficulty, be applied to the other branches of art and yet it was 'De Stijl's' ambition to create a style for all the plastic arts. Still, this definition of style in architecture tallies well with what Van Doesburg had written in 1918: 'Style is created by achieving a well-balanced relationship between the inward and the outward by means of a common consciousness of life.'[571] And elsewhere in the same booklet: 'The development of modern art towards the abstract and universal idea, i.e. away from outwardness and individuality, has - by joint efforts and common insight - made it possible to realize a collective style which - beyond person and nation - expresses plastically and really the highest and deepest and most general desire for beauty by all nations.'[572] A small group of artists has achieved this balance, which is style, but they have done so on behalf of mankind.

Van Doesburg has formulated this fact when writing: ‘The maximum of plastic possibilities is only grasped and understood by a few. The history of culture contains many examples; when a new dimension has been conquered in life by someone, a new conception of art is evolved from it. But it requires a great deal of conscious preparation of a great many, in order to turn this conception into a general cultural expression, a style.’[573] It is the task and the privilege of the artist to make these discoveries and to communicate them to mankind. For the artists of ‘De Stijl’, art is not to be isolated at all, on the contrary, it is intended to be communicative, to be a language. But - as we shall find - a precise language. It is this desire for communication that makes the artist: ‘There is a great need for the communication of these impressions and whereas any other man might content himself with a casual remark or a gesture, the artist is not satisfied until his inner impression has assumed ashape in one material or another.’[574] And elsewhere, he goes into further detail: ‘The activity of a plastic artist consists of the following: To transform the crowd of plastic impressions, the multiplicity of relations, into an orderly and calm aesthetic whole. Only a work, which has come into existence organically in this way can be called a plastic work of art and can perform its aesthetical function free from every obstacle.’[575]

Style may therefore be considered as the language in which the artist is capable of expressing and of putting his impressions in order - into which he translates the contents of his experiences. This language, though wrought by the artist, is within a relatively short space of time comprehensible to everyone. But the language seems to differ from one branch of art to the other. It seems to be so - but the system of the languages is nevertheless always the same. It has been ‘De Stijl's’ ambition, to bring the way of expression of the different arts to a zenith of purity and independence: ‘De Stijl's’ activity was to be a ‘prism of the arts’, breaking up the common artistic light into the several pure colours of its different branches. Therefore ‘De Stijl’ artists have so violently opposed any vagueness as to the limits between the arts. Mondriaan has expressed this ambition of ‘De Stijl’ so well: ‘As the content of every art is the same, the possibilities of manifestation are different in each art. These possibilities must be found by every art in its own province, and they will remain confined ta that province. Each art has its own means of expression, the use of this plastic means is therefore to be found by each art for and by itself and it will remain confined to its limits. Therefore the possibilities of one art should not be judged by the possibilities of another, but by themselves and exclusively with regard to the particular art. Each art has its own accent, its proper expression: by this fact the existence of different arts is justified.’[576] It has been ‘De Stijl's’ ambition to analyse these means of expression and to purify them from external influence. This is the way that has led ‘De Stijl’ to the purification - and the abstraction - of the elements of expression, that has led to the exclusion of all literary, subjective and extra-pictorial elements. Richter, when writing on the problems of a new visual language in abstract cinema, puts it as follows: ‘We have arrived, beyond our individual problems, at the fact of the

posing of objective problems in art (.....). This task leads (by the scientific way of examining the elements of art) towards a different aim than a better picture or a better sculpture: towards reality.'[577]

Among 'De Stijl' artists Van der Leck has been the champion of this struggle for objectivity of the elements for the objective structure of the artistic language. We have already seen, that his ambition for objectivity has played its part in the first stages of 'De Stijl's' existence. In the first annual issue of 'De Stijl' he published a short and precise article, in which he explains this conception. From this article we quote: 'To each art, separately and by itself, its own means of expression are sufficient. Only when these means of expression of each art have been reduced to purity, i.e. in connection with their nature and function, so that each art has found its essence as an independent entity, only then, a mutual comprehension, a relationship will be possible, in which the unity of the different arts will manifest itself.'[578] And, writing more especially about painting and architecture: 'Now it (painting, (ed.)) is architectural, because it serves in its own way and by its own means of expression the same idea: space and plane, as does architecture. Thus it expresses ideally "the same", but in a different way as does architecture. And therefore it forms a differentiated unity with architecture.'[579] It is that differentiated unity which is only possible by the purification of the expressive means of the different arts, which is the essential condition for a future style, or as Van der Leck terms it, for monumental art. On behalf of this prospect, the means of expression are to be reduced to their elementary purity or, in other words, to an objective, controllable condition. The tendency towards this objectivity characterizes the development of 'De Stijl's' painting in the years after 1924.

Until 1924 Mondriaan had led the way in 'De Stijl's' painting, by the creation of neo-plasticism and the further perfectioning thereof. Van der Leck had already left 'De Stijl' in 1919 and Van Doesburg had been much too absorbed by various occupations in connection with 'De Stijl' to be able to devote much of his energy to painting. Thus Mondriaan by himself, had developed and elaborated neo-plasticism, in the lonely seclusion of his Paris studio, 26, rue du Départ. It is this phase to which Van Doesburg alludes when writing in this retrospective article: 'by the suppression of every form in the sense mentioned above, including Euclidian geometry, "De Stijl" had completely broken with the past and its exhausted forms of expression. It considers painting the privileged means for the manifestation of constant relations (harmony). Thus painting has indicated the line of conduct to the other arts.'[580] But in 1925 Van Doesburg had realized elementarism, based on a much more dynamic conception and had added the diagonal to the expressive means of neo-plasticism. Van Doesburg writes about the elementary counter-composition: 'It adds a new oblique dimension to the rectilinear, peripheric composition. Thus it solves the tension of horizontal and vertical in a real way (.....). In counter-composition, the equilibrium in the plane plays a less important part. Each plane is part of peripheric space, and the composition has rather to be considered as a phenomenon of tension than as one of relations in the plane.'[581]

The counter-compositions - the most important of which is to be found at[+] the Municipal Museum in The Hague - are a further step from the stable repose of painting in the direction of its dynamic activity. A further step is marked by the most important work of painting - though not easel-painting - of this[+] period: the coloristic solution of the interior of the Café l'Aubette in Strassbourg. Van Doesburg writes about this important achievement: 'The track of man in space (from the left to the right, from front to back, from above to below), has become of fundamental importance for painting in architecture (.....). In this painting the idea is not to lead man along a painted surface of a wall, in order to let him observe the pictorial development of space from one wall to the other, but the problem is to evoke the simultaneous effect of painting and architecture.'[582] The results, achieved in the Aubette, which are now alas destroyed, have indeed been convincing. Large planes of vivid, mostly primary colour, arranged in a diagonal rhythm on the large wall opposite the window, gave a vivid and violent appearance to the entire room. The impression of a bright, modern and optimistic atmosphere was emphasized by the fact, that the rooms had been reconstructed and painted in an old 18th century building of pale red limestone; the classic and rather stern façade was a strange, but inspiring contrast to the bright shining interior, where plastic rhythm had not been achieved by subtle details or by various nuances, but by the striking contrast of forceful colour and bold linear movement. The destruction of the Aubette is indeed one of the most serious losses which modern art has suffered in the last few years; apart from Van Doesburg's work in the large hall, it also has lost an important series of works by Jean Arp and Sophie Täuber-Arp, works which, though not belonging to 'De Stijl's' conception, did by this very fact and by their immediate vicinity emphasize the essential properties of Van Doesburg's work: its objectivity, its clear and rigid construction, and the bright and joyous qualities, made to stand out by the striking purity of the work. To anyone who has not seen the Aubette, the issue of 'De Stijl' dedicated to it, can only give a very slight reflection of the work's brightness: this fact in itself proves, how important colour and its skilful use have been in this realization of 'De Stijl's' ideas; it shows as well the importance of scale and the degree of command which Van Doesburg was capable of exercising. The year after the Aubette's completion was not marked by any special event in the domain of 'De Stijl's' painting. Still, the younger painters of 'De Stijl', Vordemberge-Gildewart and Domela, gave proof of their maturing evolution during this period. Mondriaan, who no longer belonged to 'De Stijl', continued his consistent, but slow evolution toward a still greater perfection of his neo-plastic paintings. All the same, 1929 marked a new turning-point in Van Doesburg's development. From his dynamic counter-compositions, the culmination of which had been the large paintings in the Aubette, he reverts to a still more objective, controlable construction of elements. A letter to Anthony Kok illustrates better than any explanation the new direction of Van Doesburg's research: 'As I could not visualize composition of equilibrated relations as the ultimate result of more spiritual painting, I arrived, about 1924, at counter-

[+]pl. 43 aant.

[+]pl. 47 aant.

composition. I have formulated these results in my manifestoes of elementarism (cf. *De Stijl*, Nos, 73-76). Thus I had proceeded from composition to construction, whereas I have now, in 1929, totally finished with any arrangement or composition guided by sentiment. At present, I can see no more difference between the manner in which a milliner, a florist or a confectioner finds an equilibrated arrangement according to feeling, and the artist who also composes by sentiment. The manner of a bit more here, a bit less there, here a bit of this, there a bit of that, some red here and there again, some blue, etc., is too uncertain, too much connected with taste, with arrangement, than that it could satisfy me any longer (.....). I have now found a great assurance in abandoning the idea of "the modern" and accepting the "universal". What I am trying to realize, is a universal form, which entirely corresponds to my spiritual vision. As such, I accept the pyramid, a universal form which is still beautiful, because it is elementary and impersonal and which therefore remains and is ever reborn in the eye of the spectator. Such a universal form is always controlable because the construction is mathematical. It is such a controlable structure, which I claim for painting, for sculpture, for architecture; my latest painting, on which I have already been working a long time, is black, white and grey: a controlable structure, a solid surface without chance or individual caprice. Without imagination? Yes. Without feeling? Yes, but not without spirit, not without universality and, as I think, not empty...'[583]

This evolution culminates in his 'arithmetical composition' of 1930 and in the domain of theory, in the *Manifeste de l'art concret*. A few passages from the manifesto follow here: 'Construction, in relation to the proper surface of the painting or in relation to space created by colours, is controlable through the eye. Construction is totally different from arrangement (decoration) and from composition according to taste. The majority of painters work in the manner of pastrycooks or milliners. We on the contrary, work with mathematical (Euclidian or non-Euclidian) and scientific data, that is to say, with intellectual means. Before its materialisation, the work of art exists completely in the spirit. It is however, necessary that its execution show a technical perfection equal to the perfection of its conception. It should not show any trace of human weakness: no trembling, no lack of precision, no hesitation, no unfinished parts, etc. (.....). If one does not succeed in tracing a straight line by hand, one takes a ruler. Typewriting is clearer, more legible and more beautiful than handwriting. We do not want an artistic handwriting.'[584] Both the 'arithmetical composition' and the manifesto are a further step towards an objective method in art, towards what Van Doesburg and his friends understood by style. And though Van Doesburg did indeed, in those years depart from a desire for modernism towards a more universal tendency which he worded in his letter to Anthony Kok, his very striving towards objectivity, towards an art that should be independent of the vicissitudes of the individual temperament, is an expression of his time, of 20th century thought. It is this realization of the period's spirit (the common consciousness of time) which has always been 'De Stijl's' primary goal. Van Doesburg had already formulated this thought in his *Three lectures*

of 1919: ‘The content of our modern culture is different from the content of preceding cultures and the artists are now working to find a general form of expression for this content. The general form of expression of the present culture's content is style.’[585] In the same context he asserts that the modern artists have already found this expression: ‘In a more extensive survey of preceding cultures which since the memory of man have known art, the modern work of art will appear to us as the shape of the spirit of our modern time.’[586] Mondriaan, already in his early writings, had emphasized the same point: ‘As the artistic expression ought to be a living reality for man today, it ought to be the pure expression of the new consciousness of time (.....). Since neo-plasticism is to interpret the new consciousness, it ought to be homogenous with all its manifestations in life.’[587]

It is this complete agreement with all the manifestations of modern life, which ‘De Stijl’ and above all, Van Doesburg, have always sought. He wanted to go further: it was his aim to summarize all the aspects of modern life in the achievements of ‘De Stijl’ and thus to create in painting, in architecture, etc., and in the co-operation of these arts, a visible stamp of the period. This realization was to be typical for all the trends, which characterized the modern era such as: clearness, organisation, abstract thought, mathematical formula, etc. In his retrospective article of 1929 - exactly during the time when he was occupied with his ‘arithmetical composition’ - therefore, he wrote: ‘The square is, so to speak, the form of the shapeless appearance, mark or signature of the absolute and the relative in one, and it is therefore the basic scheme of the new consciousness of time, as the cross was during the Middle Ages. Every stylistic period of the past can be summarized in one schematic figuration. The least individual basic scheme of modern times is the square.’[588] The achievements of ‘De Stijl’ thereby acquire a symbolical significance, which it has certainly not been their principal intention to realize. Yet, this symbolical characterization of ‘De Stijl's’ realizations may quite well be extant. The intention however, has from the very beginning been, not to create a symbol, but an expression of their era; by confronting man with his own thoughts and ideas rendered visible by the artists, ‘De Stijl’ artists hoped to contribute to the further progress of human culture. As Van Doesburg writes in the *Manifeste sur l'art concret*: ‘A work of art, thus conceived, achieves a clarity which will be the base of a new culture.’[589]

Clearness, objectivity, have indeed always been the principal aim of ‘De Stijl’. From the very beginning, attacks on indistinctness, on the veils of nature, on individual confusion have been a recurrent part of ‘De Stijl's’ phraseology. The lack of precision, the interference of chance and of individual temperament, have always been the objection of ‘De Stijl’ against all preceding artistic realizations. According to ‘De Stijl's’ tenets, art is to become the precise instrument of the human spirit; an instrument that is to be so well-stringed that it permits maximal precision and perfection of execution.

‘De Stijl's’ activity, during the 14 years of its existence, was devoted to the construction of this perfect and reliable instrument; in other words, to the building of a permanent artistic language. By the reduction of the artistic means

of expression to their elements, the artists of 'De Stijl' have been able to discover the system of their combination, that is to say, they have been able to write the grammar of this artistic language. Of course, a knowledge of grammar does not imply a command of the language, as the command of a language does not necessarily include a capacity for artistic, poetical use. But it is indeed a most important achievement of 'De Stijl' to have established the synopsis of an artistic language, a system which may be applied equally to painting, sculpture, architecture, cinema, etc.

The younger members of 'De Stijl' who were influenced less by the universalist and Utopian thought of the first period, formulated these ideas in *De Stijl*. Richter, when explaining the principles of his abstract compositions for moving pictures, wrote as follows: 'The "language" (language of forms) which is spoken there, is based on an "alphabet" which has been derived from an elementary principle of contemplation: polarity. Polarity as a general principle of life is identical with the method of composition to be followed by every formal expression.'[590] Speaking more generally about art, he asserts in the same context: 'It has to be emphasized again and again that art is not the subjective explosion of an individual, but the organic language of man, of a most serious importance; therefore it is to be as free from error and as concise as possible, in order to be really used as such: as the language of humanity (.....). For this new art it is absolutely necessary to dispose over definite elements. Without these a (most attractive) game can be brought about, but never a language.'[591] And another of the younger artists, Graeff, hints at the same problem, when explaining his ideas on a language of signs for traffic: 'Beware of symbols! Beware of arbitrariness! One leads to decoration, the other to indistinctness. A language is to be developed. A resounding, clear language, capable of being augmented. Mere agreement is insufficient. The question is therefore, to realize the sense of the sign starting from the visual elements, from the essential elements of form and colour. The elements of form are: square, circle, triangle. These cannot be mistaken one for the other. By their concise form they permit colour to stand out most intensely. Among the colours, it is only red, yellow and blue and the neutrals black, grey and white which are individual and not to be mistaken one for the other.'[592] A similar conception would never have been possible without the realizations of 'De Stijl'. Among all its realizations, the constitution of a basis for an artistic language is perhaps the most important achievement.

By creating the elements of an artistic language, 'De Stijl' has indeed realized its initial conception: the creation of a universal means of expression. For language - any form of language - is indeed a real, a substantial realization of a universal conception. One does not need to be a convinced nominalist to admit that the 'universalia', the general notions of mankind, do exist as 'nomina', as words, even if they have no real substance. Language therefore, as a form of abstraction, is not only capable of describing or representing, it is capable as well of creation, of realization. Schoenmaekers, the philosophical godfather of 'De Stijl' had formulated this knowledge: 'Uniformity in our thought is possible in the results of our thought. In a "language" for instance, this fact is

clearly proved.'[593] And the last writings of Van Doesburg which we know, clearly emphasize this aim of 'De Stijl' as the most important; in the *Manifeste sur l'Art concret* of 1930, which may almost be called Van Doesburg's artistic testament, the first paragraph closes with these words: 'If the means of expression are liberated from all particularity, they are in harmony with the ultimate end of art, which is, to realize a universal language.'[594]

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572 *De Stijl, III*, p. 2
573 Van Doesburg, De nieuwe Beweging, p. 19
574 Van Doesburg, Drie voordrachten, p. 42
575 *De Stijl, I*, p. 3
576 *De Stijl, V*, p. 58
577 *De Stijl, I*, p. 37
579 *De Stijl, I*, p. 38
580 *Neue Schweizer Rundschau*, 1929, p. 627 (Van Doesburg)
581 *De Stijl, VII*, p. 39
582 *De Stijl*, Aubette nr., p. 34
583 Van Doesburg, Letter to A. Kok, January 23rd, 1930, Stijl Catalogue 1951, p.46
584 *Catalogue Stedelijk Museum*, Amsterdam, 1933, p. 90/91, Van Doesburg
585 Van Doesburg, Drie voordrachten, p. 60
586 Van Doesburg, Drie voordrachten, p. 53
587 *De Stijl, I*, p. 52 sq.
588 Van Doesburg, Neue Schweizer Rundschau, 1929, p. 628
589 *Catalogue Stedelijk Museum*, Amsterdam, Van Doesburg, 1936, p. 91
590 *De Stijl, IV*, p. 110
591 *De Stijl, IV*, p. 111/112
592 *De Stijl*, Anniversary number, p. 99
593 Schoenmaekers, Beeldende Wiskunde, p. 15
594 Cat. New York, 1947, Van Doesburg Exhibition.

5 de Stijl's influence on the various artistic domains

In the preceding pages, various aspects of ‘De Stijl’ have been studied: its aesthetic conception, its philosophical base, its utopian ambitions and last, but certainly not least, its actual artistic realizations. It has been attempted to characterize ‘De Stijl’ from different points of view and to give as complete an image of its character as is possible more than 20 years after its termination. But this distance in time which does not make the description of ‘De Stijl's’ character and activity any easier, facilitates in its turn another task, which is to be accomplished in this study: the examination of the consequences of ‘De Stijl’ and its influence subsequently.

The 10th anniversary number of *De Stijl* has, on the back of its cover, a list of ‘De Stijl's’ activities, reading as follows: painting, sculpture, literature, music, abstract dancing, abstract films, architecture, town planning. This list is printed across a globe with two words superimposed: Neo-plasticism and elementarism. This page is, as it were, a graphic representation of our problem: the spreading of ‘De Stijl's’ ideas in different fields over the whole world. This

expansion was a far less slow and gradual process, than one would think; on the contrary, it was a series of active and interrelating events. Though 'De Stijl' was an almost anonymous group, the expansion of its ideas is entirely due to Van Doesburg and his inspiring enthusiasm. In the introduction of the 10th anniversary number he writes: 'Though the internationalisation of "De Stijl's" idea has been the exclusive work of *De Stijl's* editor, and his work alone, "De Stijl" as a demonstration of a collective striving towards style was only possible in a group.'[595] Van Doesburg had indeed travelled a good deal, and by these journeys he spread the ideas of 'De Stijl' and at the same time made contacts for 'De Stijl' all over Europe. In doing so, he was assisted by Mrs. van Doesburg, who accompanied him on his journeys, contributing her share to these trips for 'De Stijl's' expansion by the fact that she was-and still is-a gifted pianist who could perform and bring to notice 'De Stijl's' musical achievements. The first contacts outside of Holland however, had been made by writing: already in 1918 close collaboration with the Italian group 'Valori Plastici', headed by Mario Broglio, was achieved, and in the same year Dr. F.M. Huebner had acted as a go-beween to make contacts with German artists. Van Doesburg could not start travelling until after the war and the first journey brought him to Antwerp, as the Belgians of Dutch extraction were most anxious to know about the artistic realizations in neutral Holland during the war. This contact has been without much consequence; but it had shown to Van Doesburg that personal contact could achieve more than even the clearest articles in his review could do. In the meantime, in October of 1918, the first manifesto of 'De Stijl' had been published; it had caused violent reactions in different European countries and a series of demonstrations of sympathy with 'De Stijl' were its direct consequence.

In 1920 the first contact between 'De Stijl' and the Bauhaus is achieved. At the Bauhaus, which had only been founded in 1919, Feininger showed a deep interest in 'De Stijl's' work and aims; he had first spread 'De Stijl' ideas in the small group of Bauhaus-artists. Adolf Behne, who had already corresponded with the editor of *De Stijl*, came to visit its members early in 1920 and studied the works of the group which had already been realized. In the same year, Van Doesburg received an invitation from Viking Eggeling and Hans Richter, who were working together on the realization of an abstract way of expression in film, to come and visit them in Berlin. This invitation led to Van Doesburg's trip to Berlin in December 1920 and to his first personal contact with the artists of the Bauhaus. At the house of Bruno Taut, the architect, Van Doesburg met Gropius and other Bauhaus artists, among others A. Meyer and F. Forbat. Gropius, the director of the Bauhaus, invited Van Doesburg to come to Weimar and look around for himself. Van Doesburg accepted and the visit took place in January 1921. The Bauhaus artists and Gropius above all, felt the need for a close collaboration with 'De Stijl'. After a lecturing and propaganda-trip in March 1921 to Belgium, France, Italy and Germany, Van Doesburg returned to Weimar; the editing office of *De Stijl* was installed there and the contact with the Bauhaus, which has to be examined in the following pages, had begun.

De Stijl was now printed in Germany and Van Doesburg went on lecturing tours to different German towns: Berlin, Hannover, Dresden, etc.

In 1921 Van Doesburg made a propaganda-trip to Belgium, and lectured in Antwerp, Brussels, Bruges, Ghent, etc. In the summer of this year Van Doesburg worked in Weimar, where Oud came to visit him; in the winter months he was in Berlin where he contacted another group of artists, among which was Richter who had arranged his first tour to Germany.

In 1922 Van Doesburg continued his work at Weimar, where Van Eesteren came to join 'De Stijl' group. Lectures and personal contact deepened the influence of 'De Stijl' on the Bauhaus, in a way that has to be examined.

1923 brought the invitation of Léonce Rosenberg for an exhibition of architectural work in Paris and consequently the installation of Van Doesburg and the *Stijl*-editors in Paris. The influence of the Paris exhibition on international architecture has to be examined as well, as it is of primary importance.

The same exhibition was shown, in 1924, in Weimar. The new development of architectural conception could be seen and digested by the Bauhaus artists; in the spring, a similar exhibition, to which paintings of Mondriaan were added, was opened at the Paris 'Ecole spéciale d'Architecture'. In 1924 as well, two exhibitions of works by 'De Stijl' were held in Hannover, in the Kestner-Gesellschaft and in the Gallery 'Der Quader'. There, Vordemberge-Gildewart made Van Doesburg's acquaintance and was invited by him to join 'De Stijl'. In the autumn, Van Doesburg lectured in Vienna and in Czechoslovakia, spreading 'De Stijl' ideas in these countries as well. 1924 was made important by the completion of Rietveld's house in Utrecht, which was subsequently visited by many architects and students of new architecture.

1925 brought 'De Stijl' exhibition to Nancy. By a series of manufactured complications and intrigues, 'De Stijl' could not participate in the Dutch pavilion of the 1925 exhibition of decorative art in Paris. This exclusion raised a violent protest on an international scale and drew the attention to 'De Stijl's' activities. However, 'De Stijl' participated with a large contribution in the. Exposition d'Art d'Aujourd'hui, in the autumn of 1925 in Paris. A special number of *Architecture vivante* had been dedicated by its editor, Albert Morancé, to 'De Stijl's' realizations; the issue had been welcomed by artists with great enthusiasm. In 1925 as well, 'De Stijl' works were, for the first time, shown in the United States in an exhibition in New York.

In 1926, Van Doesburg moved to Strassbourg, where he had been commissioned to reconstruct L'Aubette. There he worked in close contact with Jean Arp and Sophie Täuber-Arp. The following year and the beginning of 1928 were entirely absorbed by this activity.

In 1929, Van Doesburg returned to Paris and started designing his house at Meudon. But he found time to lecture on architecture in Madrid and in Barcelona, bringing 'De Stijl' ideas to Spain as well.

In the last years of his life, Van Doesburg was seriously hampered by his illness, an asthmatic complaint which confined him to his studio for months. Yet, his inspiring activity continued: he instigated and stimulated the foundation

of the group ‘Abstraction-Création’ which tried to continue, after Van Doesburg's death, the activity of ‘De Stijl’. But Van Doesburg's death, on March 7th 1931, delivered a serious blow to the expansion of ‘De Stijl's’ ideas. By the fact that this expansion almost stopped after 1931 and only continued indirectly, it becomes clear once more that the spreading of ‘De Stijl's’ ideas was, at least to a great extent, the personal work of Van Doesburg.

Beside Van Doesburg's personal activities there was, of course, the inspiring force of the *Stijl* review as well as publications by various other artists such as Oud, who published his *Bauhausbuch* on architecture in 1926. The importance of the works achieved for the spreading of ‘De Stijl's’ conception is difficult to estimate: it is certain however, that only a few works by ‘De Stijl’ artists were seen by the general public before 1923, as ‘De Stijl’ artists did not frequently exhibit. As to architecture, this case presents itself in a slightly different way; but until 1920 the most important architectural realizations of ‘De Stijl’ were-apart from their publication in *De Stijl*-tucked away in such remote places as Noordwijk, Katwijk, Huis-ter-Heide and Woerden, where only people who had the fixed intention of seeing them would come. Only some time later the works of Oud in Rotterdam, of Wils in The Hague, of Rietveld in Utrecht, were to become a public proof of ‘De Stijl's’ architecture. But all the same, the influence of ‘De Stijl’ starts to make itself felt as from 1920 in consequence of Van Doesburg's visit to Germany.

When dealing with the influence of ‘De Stijl’ we shall not only have to examine works by artists who have been influenced, directly or indirectly, by ‘De Stijl’ conception. We shall also have to consider the work of these artists who, for a certain period, have belonged to ‘De Stijl’ group and whose subsequent creations, after their leaving ‘De Stijl’ have been influenced by the fact of their adherence to this conception, which has in almost every case, not been denied by their estrangement from the group from personal motives. Thus, the influence of ‘De Stijl’ does not manifest itself in one large artistic current, but is split into different trends and directions which, however, are all united by the common aim, determined by ‘De Stijl’: the search for an objective way of artistic expression, that is to say, the search for an objective and universal language which was not to be limited by any particularity; in one word: style.

Our investigation of ‘De Stijl's’ influence should follow, in its sequence, the enumeration of divers directions printed on the back of *De Stijl*'s tenth anniversary issue. The list starts with painting-as painting had been the source not only of ‘De Stijl's’ influence, but of ‘De Stijl's’ activity as a whole. All the other domains of artistic activity have been influenced by the first discoveries of ‘De Stijl’ in the domain of painting: the first architectural projects by Oud, of 1917 and 1919, are a proof of the fact; besides, Oud as well as the other architects of ‘De Stijl’ are frankly and gladly admitting the fact.

Mondriaan, in one of his last essays, has written some remarkable lines on the influence of ‘Stijl’ painting, which may be quoted here: ‘Modern architecture and industry responded to our influence, but painting and sculpture were little affected. These seemed to fear that neo-plasticism might lead them into

"decoration". Actually, there was no reason for this fear in pure plastic art any more than in any other art expression. All art becomes "decoration" when depth of expression is lacking. In painting and sculpture one must also fear eclecticism. All this is more obvious in genuine abstract art; but in every period of art, the expressive means are used in common and it is not the expressive means but the use of them that reveals personality.'[596] These lines, witten in 1942, expose with perfect clarity, the two aspects of 'Stijl' influence in painting, which have, since, revealed themselves as a danger: decoration and eclecticism. Indeed, the majority of the works of painting, produced by the influence of 'De Stijl' are not much more than decoration or eclecticism and they are so by the very reason given by Mondriaan: lack of personality, lack of conviction. The great majority of 'De Stijl' followers has accepted 'De Stijl' influence not as an objective language, which has to be spoken, but as a system of forms which has to be applied. The result is an awkward mechanical aspect of these works; they seem to have transformed the neo-plastic 'equilibrium of oppositions' into a stiff anaemic contraption of straight but at the same time surprisingly harsh lines. The result is indeed, a kind of 'Stijl' mannerism-the only too obvious consequence of a borrowing of mere forms, without being aware of their content and their significance. This 'Stijl' mannerism is a proof of the importance of 'De Stijl's' general conception of life, of which the plastic realizations have been an expression; without this inherent content, without this-abstract-'motive', the application of 'De Stijl's' forms and means remains empty, remains decoration and eclecticism indeed. And eclecticism is the more painful as it is often practised with a certain lyricism, which is not only alien, but even hostile to 'De Stijl'.

A comforting fact, however, in opposition to this routine derived from 'De Stijl' is the development of the painters who survived 'De Stijl'. Mondriaan, first of all, continued to lead his neo-plastic compositions to even greater perfection. His development from 1925 on-the year when he left 'De Stijl'-is a slow but consistent evolution towards yet greater purity, towards a greater simplicity, which no one at that time would have thought possible when looking at the works of around 1925. Yet, he accomplished an even simpler but not less rich harmony in his works of the thirties, by reducing colour to a smaller proportion of the surface and by emphasizing the interplay of lines and their relation to colour. His evolution continues gradually till 1938; then he moves to London and from there to New York. There, a new phase of his evolution starts: J.J. Sweeney has given a brilliant description of this period: 'Finally in his Broadway[+] Boogie-Woogie and his unfinished Victory Boogie-Woogie we find him drawing all the strands of his research together. Here we have the restlesness and variety of minor form that he had in his first post-cubist phase,contrasting with a constant dominant rectangularity throughout the composition. The primary colours of his mature years are mingled with softer secondary squares reminiscent in tone of the golds and greys of his cubist work. And he has broken the agressiveness of his lines, abandoning not only the black, but even breaking the continuous character of the coloured bands of his first New York work with a

[+] *pl. 48* aant.

brilliant, multi-coloured mosaic effect. The whole canvas now dances with variously sized rectangles of different colours. The eye is led from one group of colour notes to another at varying speeds. At the same time, contrasted with the endless change in the minor motives, we have a constant repetition of the right-angle theme, like a persistent bass chord sounding through a sprinkle of running arpeggio's and grace notes from the treble.'[597] Under the influence of a new rhythm of life, of a surprisingly rich and vivid surrounding reality, Mondriaan, with an amazing vitality for a man of seventy, had found a new way of expression. The fact and its results are to be equally admired. Yet, one personal remark may be permitted to the author: the exclusive praise for Mondriaan's late work, which is often uttered by American critics, seems to him to be slightly misleading. With all appreciation for the vivid bright works of the New York period, he is convinced that they should not be overrated at the expense of the earlier work. He does even admit that the austere sonority of the compositions, dating from about 1930, which are so closely related to the majestic adagio of the old 'Wilhelmus', and of the Calvinist psalm-melodies, 'sound' more typical for Mondriaan's work to his eye, than the allegro rhythm of his late Boogie-Woogies.

Next to Mondriaan's work, the evolution of Van der Leck's painting is to be examined. It is essential to note that Van der Leck left 'De Stijl' in 1919, before the definite establishment of neo-plasticism and that he had opposed in 1918 already, the tendency towards a greater emphasis on linear structure, which was ultimately to result in neo-plasticism. The reference to his using for a certain time 'Mondriaan's concept of crossed vertical and horizontal lines as a basis for his composition', expressed by J.J. Sweeney,[598] must therefore be based on incorrect information. It was precisely his objection against the concept of crossed lines, which he considered as being too tight, that made Van der Leck leave 'De Stijl'. Certainly, his decision has also been influenced by personal motives, for instance by a violent distrust of Van Doesburg's versatility; but the personal motives, mentioned by Van Doesburg in the 10th anniversary number of *De Stijl* (p. 7) have certainly not been decisive. It is true, though, that Van der Leck, less influenced by universalist and speculative theories, has had a different conception of the evolution of painting, to which idea he has clung ever since and which has been the rule of conduct of his development.

Van der Leck had his doubts about the value of the universalist and speculative conceptions of his fellow-artists of 'De Stijl'. He therefore started from a different content than they did: his intention has not been, even in the first years, to reveal universal equilibrium. On the other hand, he had always opposed the particular representation: his whole development up to 1917 had tended towards an increasing generalisation, from his early naturalist works to a coloristic and linear stylisation. However, even after the foundation of 'De Stijl', he continues to consider painting principally as an objective language, capable of every expression, but bound to its own elements: plane and colour. His ambition had been to give painting its elementary objectivity as a language, to free

it from all interference by personal sentiment. ‘Painting - he once said - should be as clear as water’. Van der Leck has never been essentially an abstract painter - that is to say, he had never, beforehand, excluded motive; that is what makes him differ from his fellow - painters of ‘De Stijl’. But he had, with the same persistence as his friends, aimed at an objective pure and elementary art of painting. For him, the establishment of the elements of painting by ‘De Stijl’ - straight lines in rectangular opposition and primary colour - meant the discovery and the conquest of an objective means of expression, but nothing but a means. A means which enabled him to establish in an objective way, the ‘architecture of painting’ which Cézanne had already sought. He writes in 1949: ‘Thereafter came the struggle from the two-dimensional towards flat spaciality, from murality and monumentality towards the architectural with elementary means, that is to say the three colours plus black and white; and the three directions, by which non-figurative spacial harmonies have been realized (different compositions). But then, the whole problem of painting and colour can be solved again afterwards and by these means, for architecture as well as for the interior.’[599] The use of these elementary means differs with Van der Leck from his fellow - painters in ‘De Stijl’. First of all, he does not reject the diagonal (cf. painting 1917, *De Stijl* I, pl. 1). Besides, he entirely excludes the linear[+] element from his works, as much as Mondriaan and Van Doesburg have done in their first works of 1917. [+]*pl. 15*[aant.] He did not oppose this relation of rectangular coloured forms to a background, a fact which brought Mondriaan and Van Doesburg to an increasingly prevailing emphasis of the linear element in their painting. Coloured rectangular forms are composed, according to the three directions, on a white background; they establish a rhythm of almost musical sonority; a rhythm sometimes austere and stately, sometimes even daringly gay, depending on the motive; but by this objective, universal language he succeeded in dematerialising it to such a degree, that it became as abstracted from the particular object as a motive can be abstracted in poetry or in music: dissolved into the rhythm of forms and merged into a cadence of determined, well-established and interrelated colours.

Van der Leck's ambition as to painting had always been an organic agreement of painting and architecture, both limited to their own domains. To this problem he had devoted two articles in the first volume of *De Stijl: The place of modern painting in architecture* (p. 6), and *On painting and building* (p. 37). He had first realized this union in 1918, when designing the stand of Messrs. Bruynzeel at the Utrecht fair. In later years, this preoccupation with the shape of human surroundings had increased. In 1919 he first concerned himself with the problem of textiles, projects which have been executed only in 1928 with the Amsterdam firm Metz & Co. In 1935, he started to work in ceramics and in the following years he realized the first interiors, in collaboration with the architect W. Elling: the interior of a house at Hilversum, Rossinilaan (now destroyed) in 1939; the interior of an apartment in Amsterdam in 1948; and finally in 1952, the canteen of the factory of Messrs Ketjen in Amsterdam-North. In a complete abstraction, without any motive, he has realized there by rectangular planes of

primary colour, one of the important aims of ‘De Stijl’: to create human surroundings by purely artistic means. He has succeeded extremely well in doing so, though in quite a different manner to that of Van Doesburg in this ‘Aubette’: he did not aim at the buoyant dynamism of Van Doesburg's Strasbourg creation, but he achieved a rhythm of a sober and yet bright austerity, which. is perhaps more congenial to the Dutch residents of these houses than the more lively rhythm of the ‘Aubette’ would have been. The interiors are indeed a fine solution of the problem of giving an adequate and harmonious surroundings to modern man. They are, at the same time, a proof of the fact that Van der Leck, though leaving ‘De Stijl’ at an early date and steering a course of his own, yet always remained faithful to the essential principles of a movement which he had helped to bring into existence: the realization of an adequate artistic environment of modern man and the purification of painting, the striving for the creation of an objective pictorial language, which he has pursued - as has become evident by one of his most recent works - with relentless consistency.

Four other painters are still to be discussed in this context, dealing with the influence of ‘De Stijl’: Huszar, Severini, Vordemberge - Gildewart and Domela. Severini, however, who had always been a kind of ‘corresponding member’ of ‘De Stijl’, can be left out of account, as he never collaborated, in close personal contact, with other artists of ‘De Stijl’ and therefore never was really influenced by its conceptions. On the other hand ‘mechanical inspiration’, his aesthetical consideration of the machine, has had a certain influence on ‘De Stijl’.

Huszar, one of the constituent members of ‘De Stijl’, shows indeed the influence of ‘De Stijl’ as we have tried to define it above. Huszar was a member[+] of ‘De Stijl’ from its beginning until the end of 1922. It was he who designed the typographical appearance of the review. Some of his paintings are reproduced[+] in the first two volumes (*De Stijl* I, pl. 7, p. 61 and II, pl. 7a). But he did not realize most of his later work in free painting. In his contribution to the 10th anniversary number of *De Stijl* he tells how he had to concentrate on design for advertisements, for posters, etc. and how the demands of his employers made it impossible to realize his conceptions with the purity he had aimed at. Yet, though diluted, his works clearly show the influence of ‘De Stijl’; a tendency towards an objective, well - established use of forms, of a balance of forms in the plane, which excluded symmetry, an objective and functional use of colour. Of course, these works did not realize the utter purity ‘De Stijl’, and Huszar as well, had aimed at. They would not have been published by Van Doesburg, except in the anniversary number, as they showed signs of what Van Doesburg calls in his introduction to the anniversary issue: a relapse into naturalistic stylization. On the other hand they show how the principles of ‘De Stijl’, though diluted, entered and influenced the varions domains of human activity.

[+]*pl. 6*[aant.]

[+]*pl. 17*[aant.]

Vordemberge - Gildewart came to join ‘De Stijl’ when the original conception of neo-plasticism had already been substituted by Van Doesburg in his new conception of elementarism. Vordemberge's works of this period - about 1925 - agreed very well with Van Doesburg's dynamic conception, which had led to

elementarism. As has been stated before, Vordemberge had started immediately from abstract construction, without any naturalist or even abstractionist+ past. His early work had been inspired by man - made forms as letters, parts of machines, etc. In +*pl. 45*aant. his later work, during his participation in 'De Stijl',this preference showed in a strong and dynamic expression; a good example of this trend is his coloured lithograph of 1935. in which he succeeded admirably in transforming the lithographic technique into a clear and precise manner of expression. This love for precision is Vordemberge's most remarkable feature; he has clearly expressed it in an article in the l0th anniversary number of *De Stijl* from which we have quoted and in all his later paintings. This love for precision permitted him to achieve excellent work as a typographer and to devote his skill to different domains of plastic activity, in order to introduce an orderly and neat spirit. Precision and neatness, two of the important qualifies advanced by 'De Stijl', remain characteristic of his work; in later years - about the time he settled in Amsterdam - he developed an additional refinement: his preference for the contrast of different materials, which in earlier years had been expressed by the application of fragments of material to the canvas, had by now been transformed into a different way of treating of the canvas's surface: rough and smooth, granular and polished, glossy and matt contrast in a way which gives an additional liveliness not only to the canvas' surface, but to the pictorial expression as well. By these proceedings he has enriched 'De Stijl's' means of expression, giving a new interpretation to 'denaturalisation'.

Domela is the youngest of 'De Stijl' painters to be discussed here. His early work had much attracted Van Doesburg, who has devoted a special notice to it in *De Stijl* (VI, p. 98) in 1925. Domela's work of these years shows a strong+ dynamic expression, partly inspired by 'De Stijl', partly by the Russian constructivists, with whom he +*pl. 44*aant. had come into contact through Lissitzky in Berlin. Since 1925, he worked in closer contact with Van Doesburg and Mondriaan; the influence of these dominating personalities on the rather youthful Domela shows by a straightening and by an increasing purification of his composition. On the other hand, he developed a special aspect out of the neo-plastic and elementarist composition by executing his compositions in different materials and in separate superimposed layers. His composition of 1932 is a typical example of this period. In the same period, he designed posters and executed various typographical projects, the best known of which is the cover of the review *i 10*, edited in Amsterdam in 1927. The composition of this cover and of similar works by Domela show an independent and adequate application of 'De Stijl's' principles: Van Doesburg in his design for the cover of the *Bauhausbuch* had indicated the possibility of an application of 'De Stijl's' principles in typography as early as in 1924. But Domela, in the years around 1927 developed this possibility into an arrangement and disposal of typographical material: the habits of symmetry and axis disposition, which hitherto had been considered as laws, were abolished by his new composition and replaced by a rhythmic division of the page. The principle of division no longer followed outward and pre - established laws, but the page was divided according to its own proportions

and to the functional importance of the words. Domela had thus attained a more objective form of typographical expression.

On the other hand, he abandoned in his painting, around 1932 the rigid discipline of ‘De Stijl’; since that year he has adopted a manner which is based on the expressive character of the curved line, thus aiming at a more personal expression, which did not agree with the principles of ‘De Stijl’. Yet, the influence of ‘De Stijl’ is still visible in his manner of using different denaturalised materials.

Thus, the painters of ‘De Stijl’ all developed the principles of ‘De Stijl’ in a particular and often characteristic direction. Also, in one way or another, they all realized ‘De Stijl's’ conception, that painting, the freest form of plastic art, should lead the way for other branches of human activity.

‘De Stijl's’ sculpture, as Mondriaan had written, had, with painting, relatively little influence on the development of sculpture in general. As a matter of fact, it had been but relatively little practised in ‘De Stijl’. Vantongerloo was the only sculptor of the group and he left it in 1920 when he moved to Mentone. In the course of his later development he was carried further and further by his interest in mathematics. His compositions of the early twenties are - captivating - translations of mathematical equations into a formal language, but it is exactly their objective, mathematical quality that makes them more or less unapproachable to the spectator. Higher mathematics are not yet a content sufficiently familiar to the average man to enable it to affect, by its purely plastic representation, even someone whose plastic sensibility lies above the average. He may experience the beauty of forms, but probablyhe will not grasp their structural reasons.

About 1937, Vantongerloo, who had already in the early thirties reverted more and more to painting, adopted curved lines, thus denying the principles of ‘De Stijl’. This change, in his case, can well be explained by his preference for mathematics: higher mathematics, though, did not permit a figuration which was exclusively based on straight lines and right angles and this perception may have led Vantongerloo towards an increasing use of curved lines.

Literature in ‘De Stijl’ had always rather lived in a world of its own. It had, apart from the reaiization of certain trends which were parallel to ‘De Stijl’, been influenced by Dadaism also. Van Doesburg had found contact with Dadaism in Germany through Kurt Schwitters and he had subsequently befriended Tzara, Raoul Hausmann, Jean Cocteau, Jean Arp (who had belonged to ‘De Stijl’ since 1925 but only as a poet, not as a painter or sculptor) and Ribemont-Dessaignes. This contact had influenced ‘De Stijl's’ literary activity; it had even led to the creation of Van Doesburg's second alter ego, Aldo Camini, the materialisation of his dadaist personality. The entire domain of ‘De Stijl's’ literary activity and influence demands a monograph which cannot be achieved here, as this study is mostly concerned with ‘De Stijl's’ creative activity in the domain of plastic arts. The dadaist aspect of ‘De Stijl's’ activity therefore has been neglected here, as it did not interfere with ‘De Stijl's’ plastic work at all. It was, at least to Van Doesburg, more of a counterweight than an independent

activity. Therefore, the accents and the influence of the literary work will be considered here, to the extent in which they ran parallel with the plastic ambitions of 'De Stijl'. Our investigations have therefore to gravitate around Van Doesburg's own literary work and that of his first alter ego: I.K. Bonset. In the work of Bonset, Van Doesburg's desire for purification, for direct expression, is reflected in literature. These ambitions are well expressed by him in the 'Foundations for a new expression in verse', in *De Stijl*'s 4th volume: 'Poetry is no philosophy and certainly not history, it does not serve understanding. lt is existence itself, expressed by sound relations and contrasts of sounds. In order to realize this idea, we are to part with the multitude and the plenitude, with which the logical culture of Western Europe has burdened us during the last 50 years(.....). At first, the restitution of inner sound of the word has to be considered. To strip it of its past, it is necessary to renew the alphabet according to its abstract values of sound. This means, at the same time, the recovery of the poetic membranes of our ears, which. are weakened to such a point that long phono - gymnastic exercises are necessary. By my last sound - figures I have satisfied this need. By them, I have again created the alphabet according to the inward sound and according to poetry. From this geometrical poetry the poetical speech needed by our time can develop. Though shapeless, these verses are strictly bound to laws of tempo, relationship and contrasting effect of sound, whereas every troublesome, pathetic secondary gesture has been avoided.'[600]

This programme shows features which are indeed almost parallel to 'De Stijl's' plastic ambition; the primary aim here as well is the creation of a new language based on its proper elements and not on various outward and incidental associations. In literature as well as in plastic arts, 'De Stijl's' striving for purification has been of equal importance and the polemic accent against the production of the past equally strong. 'Logics, which are the basis of our literature, have deprived the word of its suggestive force. Thus all words are consumed, they are inappropriate as a means of expression for our deepened vitality.'[601] And the emphasis is laid in literature, as in plastic art, no more on comprehension, but on inner experience: 'What he (the poet, (ed.)) demands from his reader is not: to understand according to a logical pattern, but to experience.'[602]

The method, of the new trend in literature also, is similar to that which 'De Stijl' aims at in painting and plastic art; when Van Doesburg writes: 'We have tested again the rnaterial of the words and we have brought it in agreement with the exact weight of the new spirit',[603] we can easily compare this passage with another one, quoted on p. 149 of this study, in order to see the parallelism of both movements. But the most striking parallelism between the literary and the plastic tendency of 'De Stijl' can be found in the determination of its aim: 'Creative syntax; the word, the language, the sentence - according to a process of ideal 'possessedness' will be capable of altering human mentality so deeply and essentially, that an entirely new way of seeing and of thinking will be the result.'[604] Thus, poetry and literature have been allotted a similar task to painting: to change, that is, to improve the aesthetic qualifies in man

and thereby to lead towards the evolution of a happier and brighter mankind.

The one essential difference between ‘De Stijl's’ plastic and its literary ambitions is, that the latter have been - almost by definition - confined to the limits of the Dutch language. Though on principle as international, because of its being universalist, as the other tendencies of ‘De Stijl’, the literary production of ‘De Stijl’ was based on the existing laws of Dutch language and could not exert any influence beyond its boundaries. After a period of poetical research, directed towards different aims in the thirties, a younger, post-war generation again became conscious of the importance of purifying the poetical means of expression. Though their research is not aimed at the construction of an objective language, all these young Dutch authors and poets, Schierbeek, Vinkenoog etc, have been, consciously or unconsciously, influenced by ‘De Stijl's’ experiments in language, syntax and phonetics. The poetic results, published in ‘De Stijl’ by Bonset, Kok, Arp and by guests and friends such as Til Brugman, Schwitters a.o. have certainly not passed unobserved and the - sometimes. violently riotous - literary soirees, illuminated by Mrs. Van Doesburg's musical performances, still live in the memory of many an older contemporary. The influence of the ‘Stijl's’ literary trend has been more indirect: it continued its underground course for many years, till it came again to light by the creations of a younger generation, in the years after the second world war.

Music had been, in ‘De Stijl's’ activity, closely linked up with literature. We have seen that the literary soirees of ‘DeStijl’ were accompanied by the musical performances of Petro van Doesburg. In the first years of ‘De Stijl’ and even in the years before, there had existed a close friendship between Mondriaan and the composer Van Domselaar. This friendship led to Mondriaan's taking an active interest in music and on the other hand to Van Domselaar's attempt to realize in music the conception, expressed in painting by Mondriaan. Van Domselaar did indeed, about 1916, achieve a few compositions, of only 15 bars each, which expressed a similar tendency towards harmony and musical equilibrium. They are, however, an expression of a static balance and therefore more parallel to the plastic movement of ‘De Stijl's’ early years. What Van Domselaar tried to realize in his short compositions, was to substitute melody and its continuous flow by a marked harmonic opposition which created equilibrium by simultaneous contrast.

After Mondriaan's departure for Paris, the contact with Van Domselaar lapsed somewhat; Mondriaan, though, became acquainted in Paris with the Dutch composer Daniel Ruyneman and both exchanged their views on the future development of painting and music. Ruyneman's compositions of these years show an increasing tendency towards the use of elementary musical means, their contrasting effect resulting in a well-established balance.

Mondriaan's interest in music found its expression in two articles on the future development of music: in the 4th volume on: *Les bruiteurs futuristes italiens* and *The new in music* (pp. 114, 130) and in the fifth annual series on Neo-piasticism and its realisation in music (pp. 1, 17). In these articles, Mondriaan rejects the traditional, melodic system of musical composition, he opposes the

individual expression of the composer, the soloist and the musician and establishes quite clearly the aim of neo-plastic conception in music: the creation of an objective language in music. To this end, he demands new instruments, capable of producing even and distinct sounds and inappropriate to interpreting any human emotion. He claims a new rhythm, based on opposition and a new way of composition which excludes vagueness, sentimentality and the domination of individual feelings. However, Mondriaan is aware of the fact that these claims and solutions are still more or less Utopian and that their significance consists in their marking the aim. It is in this context also, that Mondriaan develops his fascinating Utopian vision of the place, where modern music will be executed and where, in the intervals, projections of neo-plastic paintings might be shown (*De Stijl*V, pp. 21-22). This conception is indeed the most surprising modern attempt to realize the 'Gesamtkunstwerk' which - since the middle of the 19th century, since the days of Wagner - has been the secret aim of a large section of European culture.

Neither Van Domselaar nor Ruyneman had belonged to 'De Stijl'; only one musician has indeed - though for a short time from 1924 on - been a member of 'De Stijl': George Antheil. In several articles of *De Stijl* he has expressed his musical conceptions: a development of music that should emphasize the instrumental, objective qualities, which do already manifest themselves in present day's musical execution, where the individual musician has been more or less reduced to a machine. Only by a further consistent development of this tendency could music realize what plastic art had already expressed by its newly established and elementary means. He advocates (*De Stijl*VI, pp. 99-102) a new mass-music, produced by giant machines, according to purely mechanical procedings and he insists (*De Stijl* VI, p. 152 sq.) on the fact that music establishes time in the way that painting - and especially neo-plastic painting - attempts to establish space. But Antheil, in his later years, more and more reverted to traditional composition, so that little has survived of the direct musical influence of 'De Stijl'.

The next on the list, printed on the cover of *De Stijl*'s l0th anniversary issue is the abstract dance. Van Doesburg refers to an article, published in *De Stijl* (VII, p. 12) by Valentin Parnac, describing a dance 'Epopée', created and executed by Parnac in the Meyerhold theatre in Moscow in 1925. Indeed, this dance and its spacial score, reproduced with the article, show a tendency similar to 'De Stijl's' realization in plastic art: first of all, the dance is 'abstract' in the sense of its having no particular subject, no individual content. Besides, it realizes another, much emphasized ambition of 'De Stijl': the tendency towards denaturalization. The human body, which after all is the means of expression of the dance, has been denaturalized to such a degree, that the dance might be expressed in a simple linear scheme. The article by Parnac has - to our knowledge - been the only manifestation of 'De Stijl's' activity in the domain of the abstract dance. On the other hand, 'De Stijl's' influence made itself felt on dancing in the subsequent years - on dancing and perhaps even more on choreography. There, the curved line has been avoided increasingly

and a scheme of choreographic composition, based on the contrast of horizontal and vertical movement, has, in a like measure, been adopted. It is exceedingly difficult to quote examples of this new tendency which manifested itself in choreography and dance in the late twenties, as photographs are scarce and only show one moment out of a development in time, but the fact of a gradual change to a more rectilinear scheme seems to be none the less well established.

The following field of 'De Stijl's' activity and influence, abstract film, has several features in common with abstract dancing: principally that it manifests itself in space and time. The flrst realizations of abstract film, by Viking Eggeling and Hans Richter, are introduced in *De Stijl* by Van Doesburg in an article on *Abstract expression in film* (*De Stijl* IV, p. 71 sq.), where he writes: 'The idea of overcoming the static character of painting by the dynamic trend of film technique has already been practised by the artists who have tried to solve the modern problems of plastic art by means of the advanced technique of the film, thus uniting aesthetically the dynamic with the static.'[605] There, Van Doesburg compares abstract expression of the film with music, as both imply a factor of time in their composition. Van Doesburg summarizes, in this new abstract realization, its possibility of objective expression and its anti-individualist tendencies: 'When film technique will be entirely suitable for dynamo-plastics, the plastic artist will "write" his compositions for the film; colour and relation of forms will be exactly indicated by figures, whereafter their projects will find their most perfect and most precise expression by mechanical means, by an electric current.'[606] In a following issue of *De Stijl*, Richter comments on his realizations and four phases (bars) out of the scene of his film are reproduced (*De Stijl* V, p. 109 sq.): 'The event by itself; plastic evolution and revolution in the pure artistic sphere (abstract forms); almost analogous to the phenomena of music which are familiar to our ear. As in music, the action (in its most spiritual sense) comes out by the pure material and finds its tensions and its solutions in this material in a way, which - by the disappearance of all material comparisons and reminiscenses - is elementary and magical.'[607] He emphasizes the importance of the creation of a language of forms which, by its elementary composition, can be indeed really objective: 'For this new art it is absolutely necessary to dispose over primary elements. Without these, a (most captivating) game can be the result, but never a language.'[608] In the fifth volume of *De Stijl* Richter again formulates his plastic principles, and insists once more on the need for objectivity (*De Stijl* V, pp. 91-92). The reproductions of several phases of his new composition 'heavy - light', which illustrate the article, had been published in an earlier issue (*De Stijl* V, opp. p. 24). But the essential contribution to this problem is Van Doesburg's article *The Manifestation of light and time* (*De Stijl* VI, p. 58), as a comment on a reproduction of a moment out of a film by Richter (*De Stijl* VI, p. 57) and a film-score by Graeff (*De Stijl* VI, opp. p. 64). The conclusion of the article, in which he insists on the realization of a modern, dynamic way of elementary expression and on the fact that the film has been liberated from its reproductive task, is as follows: 'The possibilities of plastic expression are thus to be found in time as well as in space - just as in

modern architecture - and they are capable of rendering visible a new dimension, when the factors of time and of space come to equivalent (equilibrated) expression (.....). Free from statics and from gravity, the film is able to realize a new architecture of light and time, which satisfies our modern emotion of life.'[609]

Abstract film had indeed been a most valuable realization of 'De Stijl'. Its influence, its consequences have been very important indeed: almost all the films produced since 1924, in which film technique does not aim at a reproduction of nature but at an expressive language of its own, are based in one way or another on the first experiments of Eggeling and Richter, on the experiments of 'De Stijl'. And there are quite a number of these films, differing in quality, in expressive strength and in execution, from MacLaren to Fishinger, a.o.

Architecture is the most important domain in which 'De Stijl's' influence made itself felt. And indeed, this influence dates back to the earliest days of 'De Stijl'. We have seen how the first projects of 'Stijl' architecture, as Oud's houses on the esplanade and his factory at Purmerend, were developed directly from the new conceptions of painting and it is therefore quite logical that Oud - with his usual frankness - writes in his book on Dutch architecture: 'The painter Piet Mondriaan; a person to whom "new objectivity" in architecture is very much indebted.'[610] In the same work he defines this development even more precisely: 'In Holland it has mainly been modern painting which by its influence revolted against traditional architecture. The work of the cubist and the futurist did this in the beginning, but only negatively so; as a reaction. Mondriaan's neo-plasticism (with its fervent propagandist Van Doesburg and his review *De Stijl*) later brought values to bear, which have been of positive importance to architecture. Mondriaan's composition - rectangular planes of pure colour, divided by straight black lines - gave the impulse to the rise of cubism in architecture (Dudok, later on, derived his work from it, Rietveld was its most complete representative).'[611] Thus far, Oud's remarks mostly concern the Netherlands, and architectural development there. But soon after the end of the first world war and the reopening of the frontiers, 'De Stijl's' influence spread across Europe.

The importance of Van Doesburg's trip to Germany has already been mentioned in this context. But its actual consequences have not yet been examined; they are really most important for the development of modern architecture. A few lines from the article, already quoted, by Peter Röhl in the 10th anniversary number of *De Stijl* may be recalled here. The article is called *The commencement and development of the Style 1921 in Weimar*: 'The year 1921 was of the highest importance for Weimar and for the development of German art. In 1921 the Dutchman Theo van Doesburg came to Weimar as our guest. His work was devoted to the new expression, which he suggested us by his achievements (.....). To Van Doesburg we owe the evolution of modern architecture. Everywhere his suggestions can be found, applied and realized in new typography, in painted interiors, etc.'[612]

Indeed, this very bold statement - that the evolution of modern architecture

is due to Van Doesburg, or to 'De Stijl' - can be proved to a certain extent at least, as far as Germany is concerned. Van Doesburg was really aware of the fact and he writes in his retrospective articles in 1929: 'Today one tries to ignore the fact, but at the time, in 1921-1923, the neo-plasticism of "De Stijl" dominated the whole of modern creation, from its two centres, Weimar and Berlin. At the desire of many young artists, the author conceived, in 1922, the plan of opening a "Stijl" course. This course, which has been mainly attended by pupils of the Bauhaus, contributed a great deal to re-orientate the creative mentality, as just about that time the younger German artists turned away from the caprice of expressionism. The intervention of "De Stijl" was extremely opportune for bringing the young artists into order and discipline.'[613] In this context, Van Doesburg mentions a series of names; in Weimar Max Burchartz, Peter Röhl, Marcel Breuer, Adolf Meyer, Dexel, Forbat, a.o.; in Berlin Werner Graeff, Mies van der Rohe, Richter, Hilbersheimer. It is interesting to check these facts by comparing architectural results, using two publications as basic material: Walter Gropius' *Internationale Architektur* (Albert Langen, Munich 1927, 2nd ed., Bauhausbuch nr. 1) and the official publication of the Bauhaus *Staatliches Bauhaus Weimar, 1919-1923* (Bauhausverlag, Weimar - München, 1923). From the illustrations the influence of 'De Stijl' on the Bauhaus pupils can already be noted quite definitely. But it is necessary to subject the events in Weimar in the years 1921 to 1923 to a yet closer examination, in order to gain full comprehension of the consequences.

The 'Staatliches Bauhaus', an institution dating from 1919 and the result of the initiative of W. Gropius, tried in its first years to revive the spirit of the mediaeval building community. Its slogan of 1919 runs as follows: 'The Bauhaus strives for the gathering of all artistic creation into unity, for the reunion of all artisan discipline into a new art of building, as its indivisible parts. The final, though remote, aim of the Bauhaus is the complete work of art (Einheitskunstwerk) - the great structure in which there is no frontier between monumental and decorative art.'[614] It is obvious that this passage has been inspired by an ambition to create an equivalent of the mediaeval cathedral, the prototype of the 'Einheitskunstwerk'. But this striving for an almost anonymous realization of a collective and universal work of art was opposed in the Bauhaus by a tendency towards self-expression, which introduced a markedly individualist aspect. Both tendencies merged, in the first years of the Bauhaus, into an atmosphere of mystic exaltation; the Bauhaus terminology, dividing the workers into 'Meister' and 'Schüler' is typical of a spirit of romantic nostalgia, of a retrospective idealism. It may have been influenced as well, by the - similar - literary tendencies which found their origin in the 'circle' of Stefan George.

Van Doesburg, in the 10th anniversary issue of *De Stijl* quotes an article in the Chicago Evening Tribune of May 10th, 1927, written by Baron Dr. V. Erffa, on the events of 1921-1923 and the character of the Bauhaus before Van Doesburg's arrival. He characterizes the spirit of the Bauhaus by stating that it developed 'almost into a cloister'.[615] He quotes the influence of Johannes Itten (whose important deed was the introduction of the Bauhaus 'Vorkurs'), his

inclination towards the mystic writings of Swedenborg and his preference for the doctrines of St. Thomas Aquinas and the Confessions of St. Augustine. All these signs of a mystic exaltation may have been perfectly genuine and natural in post-war Germany - they led to a violent clash when Van Doesburg arrived in Weimar in 1921. Yet, as Van Doesburg saw immediately, the Bauhaus promised many possibilities for modern and constructive activity for, besides all romantic ideals and mystic exaltation, its principal aim was the merging of art and life, the bridging of the gap between artist and public. Van Doesburg was keenly aware of this fact and of the possibilities for a development coinciding with the aims of 'De Stijl'; 'not "art for art's sake", but "art for life" was the device in Germany, but its significance was as badly misunderstood as was later the "new objectivity" (Neue Sachlichkeit) which came from Oud.'[616]

During these two years, 1921 and 1922, Van Doesburg led a violent campaign against the tendencies of self-expression, of the individual conception of the artist's task. He organised 'De Stijl' course, which has been already mentioned, with the result that the Weimar art world was indeed split up into two groups. The resulting clashes and outbursts have been mentioned most discreetly by Van Doesburg in his retrospective articles in the 10th anniversary number and in the *Neue Schweizer Rundschau* in 1929. He propagated the principles of 'De Stijl', he explained the leading ideas of neo-plasticism in painting and in architecture. In spite of the opposition in the Bauhaus, a gradual change took place in its general orientation. The change can be demonstrated in the works of the Bauhaus as well as in other documents. It comes down to what Erffa says in the article, quoted by Van Doesburg: 'Bauhaus however, has gone constructivist.'[617] Constructivism - the new trend in building, known under different other names as well - has indeed sprung from the clash of the Bauhaus mentality with the ideas of 'De Stijl', brought to Weimar by Van Doesburg. 'De Stijl's' ambition for aesthetic purity and objectiveness and the Bauhaus' endeavour to realize the 'Einheitskunstwerk', together brought forward a new conception of architecture, which dominated Germany for the next decade, until Hitler's grab for power. After 1933 it spread across Europe and over to the United States.

The contrast of the Bauhaus work before and after 1921 becomes indeed very clear by comparing two works by Gropius: the house 'Sommerfeld' in Dahlem-Berlin (*Bauhaus publication* pl. 116, 117, pp. 174, 175) dating from 1920-21, and the reconstruction of the Jena theatre (ibid. pl. 114, 115, pp. 172, 173) of 1922. The first example is still vaguely expressionist, there is no sign of any denaturalisation of material. The furniture, designed by Marcel Breuer (ibid. pl. 36 and 117) shows a similar character and is slightly reminiscent of parallel work of the 'Amsterdam School' in the Netherlands, a group led by de Klerk, which was continuously and violently attacked by Oud and Van Doesburg for their lack of objective discipline and their tendency towards self-expression, that is to say, individualism. The reconstruction of the Jena theatre, however, built after 'De Stijl's' influence had made itself felt, shows a conception of architecture which is closely related to Oud's buildings of the preceding years, at any

rate with ‘Stijl’ architecture of the same period. And a chair by Marcel Breuer (ibid. pl. 41, p. 83) can be set against to the one belonging to the Sommerfeld house; it is indeed closely related to Rietveld's chair of 1917, mentioned earlier.

The influence of ‘De Stijl's’ conception can be demonstrated in the work of different German artists of the period. Alfred H. Barr has shown the relation of Van Doesburg's 1918 painting ‘Russian dance’ to an architectural project of Mies van der Rohe of 1922: the scheme of composition as a pattern of rectangular opposition, is definitely derived from ‘De Stijl’.[618] It is perhaps the most spectacular illustration of Oud's thesis on the genesis of modern architecture: ‘As remarkable as it may sound, new objectivity (nieuwe zakelijkheid) has come forth for a very great part from the development which the liberal arts - above all painting - had taken initially. The reason for its form lay in any case much more there - that is, in the aesthetic domain - than in the “objective”. This is clearly visible in its earliest expressions, and the influence has been such that ‘objectivity’ had often been completely sacrificed to aesthetic expression. Horizontal and vertical intersections of parts of a building, plates which hung suspended, corner windows, etc., all these features were for a certain time very much *en vogue*; their derivation from painting and sculpture can be easily demonstrated and they have been continuously used with on without any practical aim.’[619]

The consequences of ‘De Stijl's’ conception on German architecture are indeed far-reaching and they can be demonstrated by various instances: Gropius' 1922 projects for the Chicago Tribune building (Gropius, *Internationale Architektur* p. 47) is almost as closely related to a painting by Van Doesburg as Mies van der Rohe's project mentioned above; and Mies van der Rohe's model for a country-house of 1923 (ibid. p. 69). Projects of later years, by the same artists, still show the importance of the 1921-1922 influence, though they are sometimes superseded by a more recent influence of ‘De Stijl’: the results of the collaboration of Van Doesburg and Van Eesteren, which were exhibited in Paris in 1924, and, in the same year, in Weimar and which did not fail to exert a new influence on the Bauhaus and the artists assembled there. But before examining this second infiltration of ‘De Stijl’ into German architecture, the influence of ‘De Stijl’ on the general conception of the Bauhaus should not be forgotten. Gropius' introduction to the Bauhaus publication of 1923, dealing with the ‘idea and structure of the Staatliches Bauhaus’ starts as follows: ‘The idea of today's world can already be recognised, though its shape is still vague and confused. The old dualist image of the world, the ego as an opposition to the universe, is fading; the conception of a new unity of the world, implying the absolute neutralisation of all opposing tensions, looms up instead.’[620] It may be permitted to compare these passages, with some of the sentences in the first manifesto of ‘De Stijl’, published in 1918: ‘There is an old and a new consciousness of time. The old is connected with the individual. The new is connected with the universal. The struggle of the individual against the universal is revealing itself in the world-war as well as in the art of the present day. The war is destroying the old world with its contents; individual domination in every

state. The new art has brought forward what the new consciousness of time contains: a balance between the universal and the individual.'[621] Parallelism between these two texts is evident and 'De Stijl's' manifesto having been published five years previous to Gropius' article, the direction of the influence is unquestionable. These lines show, that 'De Stijl's' influence on the Bauhaus has not only been limited to the formal, aesthetic conception of architecture, in which the Bauhaus followed 'De Stijl', but Van Doesburg's visit to Weimar had indeed achieved a re-orientation in the Bauhaus conception of art: it no longer lost itself in mystic exaltation, but it accepted the task of the realization by new means, of a problem presented by the period's circumstances. The solution was 'new objectivity'. Oud has perhaps thought of this transformation which he witnessed from near by, when he wrote; 'The development of new architecture must be a trial to everyone who sticks to the existing world of thought and feeling, considering art - without any possibility of an exception - as a kind of narcotic that withdraws us from reality and removes us into a Kingdom of Dreams, where all activity comes to a standstill and where we sink into the apathetic dullness of spiritual stupefaction. New architecture does not do so: it no more wraps up the common things of everyday life into forms remote from reality, as it used to do nearly always formerly. On the contrary: it accepts the problems, simply and plainly, as they appear and it grows up from active life, which it cherishes. The aim of new architecture can be described in a few words: the seeking of clear forms for clearly expressed needs'.[622] These lines, which are the conclusion of Oud's article on *Modern international Architecture* show clearly that 'De Stijl's' effort towards a purification of the plastic means of expression has been one of the most important factors in the genesis of a new architecture, which, alternately, is called 'constructivism' functionalism, or 'neue Sachlichkeit'.

Until now, the German line of development has been examined. This is indeed, chronologically, the first and perhaps the most important for its influence and its spreading over Europe and the New World. The influence of 'De Stijl' on French architecture is linked up with 'De Stijl's' architectural exhibition in Paris in 1923. When tackling the problems, set for this manifestation - the private house for Léonce Rosenberg, the artist's house, etc. - 'De Stijl' had already developed further than it had been when it had influenced the Bauhaus. The collaboration of Van Doesburg, Van Eesteren and Rietveld had indeed resulted in more developed architectural results: the architectural solution had acquired a new freedom, it had liberated itself - by the analytical method - from its dependence on painting and sculpture and it was dealing, much more indeed than it had done before, with space, the expressive means of architecture. Van Doesburg had described the aims of the 1923 exhibition in his 1929 retrospective article as follows: 'Instead of repeating already established solutions, we aimed at raising architecture and painting to a height unconjectured hitherto and to bring them into yet closer relation. The house has been dismembered and dissected into its plastic elements. The static axis of old construction has been destroyed; the house became an object around which one could walk on all

sides. This analytical method led to new possibilities of construction and to a new ground plan. The house became free from the ground and the ceiling became a roof-terrace and consequently a kind of extra floor, laid open. At that time these problems were completely new and nobody had concerned himself with them as seriously as the young Dutch architects and painters.'[623]

Architecture in France has certainly been influenced by the achievements of this exhibition; the influence can be traced in the work of Mallet Stevens and quite distinctly in that of Gabriel Guevrekian. His project for a hotel for motorists of 1923 (Gropius, op. cit. p. 56) is certainly derived from architectural models of 'De Stijl', though Guevrekian's project has not yet entirely broken away from symmetrical design. But even the inspired and independent personality of Le Corbusier has been influenced by the new architectural ideas of 'De Stijl'. A careful analysis of his work in the years from 1920 till 1925 will show that certain elements - almost the same which Van Doesburg mentions in his article - have entered into the work of this independent architectural genius in or after 1923 and that indeed, as Van Doesburg puts it,'1923 has been a turning point in architecture'[624] not only for 'De Stijl', but, through its influence, for all European architecture as well.

When studying the work of Le Corbusier chronologically in the survey of his complete oeuvre (Le Corbusier et Pierre Jeanneret, *Oeuvre complet de 1910-1929*, nouvelle édition publiée par W. Boesiger et O. Stonorov, introduction et textes par Le Corbusier; éd. Dr. H. Girsberger, Zürich 1937), three important architectural features will appear more clearly and pronouncedly after 1923: the free development of the roof, the suspended structural conception and the use of colour. The prototypes of Le Corbusier's early work, the villa at Vaucresson of 1922 and the house of the painter A. Ozenfant in Paris of the same year, show the basis of his later development, but both still are essentially cubist architecture: the Vaucresson villa (Le Corbusier, op. cit. pp. 48-53) is a cubic block, where only the roofing over the front door with the balcony above it breaks out into another direction. The roof is flat, accentuating the closed and solid structure of the building, which is firmly anchored in the ground. The house of the painter Ozenfant in Paris (Le Corbusier, op. cit. pp. 55-57) shows similar features: indeed, a freer solution of the roof could not have been possible here for practical reasons, but a certain square - set aspect still prevails, which contrasts quite obviously with the active movable aspect of the later works and with the products of 'De Stijl' in 1923.

As examples of Le Corbusier's later work, the maquette of the Salon d'Automne of 1924 (Le Corbusier, op. cit. p. 59) may be quoted, as well as the Jeanneret and La Roche houses of 1923 (Le Corbusier, op. cit. pp. 61-68), showing a development of roof-gardens and a freer solution of suspended parts of the structure. The most convincing proof of this development is the double house Lipchitz - Miestchaninoff at Boulogne sur Seine of 1924 (Le Corbusier, op. cit. pp. 70-71), where the roof is completely employed as living-space and where the suspended elements are much more emphasized than before.

'Stijl' emanation on the work of Le Corbusier can be traced in his magnificent

realization of the modern quarter of Pessac-Bordeaux (Le Corbusier, op. cit. 78-86) in the use of colour. The photographs on pp. 79, 81 and 85 give only a feeble impression of the striking beauty of colour, shining in a brilliant southern sun. Pessac has indeed proved to man, the layman as well as the student of architecture, the invaluable importance of colour in architecture; as a matter of fact, it is brought out in wonderful effect by the sun and the air of southern France. Pessac, built in 1925, shows all the new features in Le Corbusier's work united to a new and splendid beauty: the use of colour, the conception of the roof as a living space and the use of protruding and suspended architectural elements. There is still another fact to be noticed in this context: the project of Pessac is based on studies for a standard type of house which were made in 1923-25 (Le Corbusier, op. cit. p. 69). In these studies a method of architectural projection may be found which must be considered as new in the work of Le Corbusier (at least as far as our documentation leads) but which, on the other hand, coincides with the method of 'De Stijl' in its architectural drawings and projects for the 1923 exhibition.

It would, of course, be a serious mistake to call Le Corbusier's later work a ramification of 'Stijl' influence. Le Corbusier, who is one of the most inspiring and vivacious artists of the first half of the 20th Century, has from the very beginning developed an architectural opinion of his own. Yet, it may be affirmed that the 1923 exhibition of 'DeStijl' in Paris, which Le Corbusier visited[625], has acted as a stimulus on his further evolution and has contributed to the realization of one of the most perfect architectural creations of this century: the garden district of Pessac-Bordeaux as well as to the other later works of Le Corbusier.

The influence of the Paris exhibition of 1923 has been relatively limited in comparison to the repercussions after the same series of projects, exhibited in 1924 at Weimar. This show administered a new shock to German architects, who had already been made acquainted with 'De Stijl's' work by Van Doesburg's stay in Weimar, three years before. Many examples of this influence can be traced, the most outstanding is perhaps Gropius' Bauhaus building in Dessau (Gropius, op. cit. p. 22) of 1925/26. In Gropius' publication, this building is shown in an aerial photograph, thus arriving at an approximately similar effect with the existing building as Van Doesburg and Van Eesteren had aimed at in their architectural projections on paper. This type of architectural drawing can be traced as well in the work of the Bauhaus pupils: Forbat's project for a house, dating from 1924 (Gropius, op. cit. p. 82) and Molnar's project for a one-family house of 1923 (Gropius, ibid. p. 78), Marcel Breuer's project for a house in steel construction of 1926 (Gropius, ibid. p. 91). In all these projects as well as in Gropius's and A. Meyer's models (Gropius, op. cit. pp. 72-73) of 1923 and 1924, the elements developed by 'De Stijl' appear clearly enough: all these structures are indeed derived, more or less, from the permanent and ever-recurrent influence of 'De Stijl' on the Bauhaus.

Yet, in spite of the fact that functional architecture was first realized on a larger scale in Germany, German functionalism did not retain the leading

position; the centre of functionalist architecture reverted soon enough to its place of origin, Holland. Oud and a series of younger architects as Duiker, Brinkman and Van der Vlugt, Van Loghem, Stam and others developed functionalism - or 'nieuwe zakelijkheid' - towards its culminating point. Works, such as Oud's Kiefhoek-settlement; the Bergpolder appartment-building in Rotterdam by Brinkman, Van der Vlugt and Van Thijen; the 'Van Nelle' factory by Brinkman and Van der Vlugt with Stam's collaboration; Duiker's open-air school in Amsterdam and his Zonnestraal hospital at Hilversum; Stam's project for a building on the Rokin and his plans for the station in Geneva, which together all continued the architectural conceptions of 'De Stijl', brought Dutch functional architecture to the front ranks in Europe. It is this architecture, about which Oud, its earliest protagonist, writes when demonstrating its origin: 'On one hand cubism - misunderstood - went down into a new romanticism: playing with block - like masses for the sake of playing only. But on the other hand new values were born from it, which have been the spiritual basis of new architecture: straight and rigid lines, bright surfaces, pure colour, pure proportion, brightness of atmosphere, plainness, reciprocal action of full and empty (in architecture: between volume and space, between interior and exterior, etc.).'[626]

A lengthy list of realizations of functional architecture could be given here, in order to demonstrate the spreading of 'Stijl' influence to different countries. A few monuments can only be mentioned here out of the profusion of results. Yet it has to be mentioned that another factor played its part in the development of functionalism - as it had been of influence on 'De Stijl': the admiration for engineering and for the results of technical production; as Oud writes in his study on new architecture: 'In full connection with this development and interrelated with it, there was a fervent enthusiasm among the vanguard of plastic artists (who had always accepted modern life in its extreme consequences) for the beauty, realized quasi unintentionally in large constructions (concrete and iron) and in more refined technique (motorcars, airplanes, steamships etc). The work of the engineer has been admired for its reasonableness, and the technical product has been set as an example for its unity of logical form and its fine appearance.'[627] Functional architecture developed according to this line of thought, that is to say, it gradually drew away from its aesthetical source and became instead, increasingly a function in human life. It moved away from the individual work of art and approached style progressively - an anonymous expression of its period. Oud, in his study on new architecture, characterizes this development as follows: 'For these architects, building therefore does no longer mean the opportunity to give full rein to their artistic passion when executing a commission, but they try as much as possible to satisfy the needs of the people who have commissioned them and they aim at the realization of all the direct happiness and comfort of life that can possibly be drawn from their task.'[628]

In his study, Oud mentions a series of monuments of new building of which the most characteristic item may be quoted here and to which a few others

may be added. As the most important buildings in Holland have already been listed, Dutch functional architecture will not be mentioned again, except the works of Dutch architects abroad; in France the various works of Le Corbusier; houses in the rue Mallet Stevens by Mallet Stevens; works by André Lurçat, more especially his hotel Nord-Sud in Calvi (Corsica); in Germany Gropius' Bauhaus buildings, Haesler's blocks of houses at Celle; Hilbersheimer's houses in Berlin; the important results of the Stuttgart architectural show of 1927 at the[+] Weissenhofsiedlung, with examples by Le Corbusier, Oud and Stam; Stam's settlements in Frankfurt and E. May's settlements in the same town. In Czechoslovakia the important house 'Tugendhat' in Brno, by Mies van der Rohe; in Spain Mies van der Rohe's German pavilion of the 1927 exhibition at Barcelona and a club house at San Sebastian by Labayan and Aizpurua; in Sweden the students' hostel at Stockholm by Markelius and Ahren; in the United States Kiesler's Film Guild cinema in New York - to quote only a few early examples of the development of functional architecture. They all show, as Oud writes 'that art is slowly but surely passing into style',[629] thereby realizing the ultimate aim which had animated 'De Stijl' and which it professed by its name. But when surveying the outward development of what Oud prefers to call 'international architecture', one point - already mentioned by Van Doesburg - cannot be[+] sufficiently emphasized: 'the Utrecht house by Rietveld-Schräder preceded all these realizations.'[630] Indeed, the Utrecht house is the first and foremost accomplished realisation of a new trend in European architecture and in spite of the further development of architecture, it may still be counted among the finest. All the aims of 'De Stijl' have been realized in it and in such a way that it has become not only a monument of 'De Stijl' but indeed, a monument to the architecture of the period.

[+]pl. 46[aant.]

[+]pl. 37[aant.]

Town-planning is the field of activity with which the list on 'De Stijl's' cover ends. The development of modern town-planning is due, to a large extent at least, to van Eesteren, Parallel to the development of 'De Stijl' he has led town-planning from a utopian phase towards practical realization. He has emphasized in town-planning the analytical method - which has been his contribution to 'De Stijl' - and is still doing so. The fact that the international organisation of the C.I.A.M. *(Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne)* realizes the principles of 'De Stijl' is mainly due to Van Eesteren. It is but for the fact that a town-planner's work does not appear to advantage until after a considerable lapse of time, that Van Eesteren is not more generally known outside the circle of architects and planners. But when the new project for the enlargement of Amsterdam will be realized, at last his work will finally become visible and his merits will be evident to all. This plan of which he is the spiritual author, has been elaborated in long years of analytical work, establishing the social and practical needs of the surplus of the Amsterdam population which needs housing. From this profound analysis of facts, a project has resulted which comes near to realizing 'De Stijl's' aims in town-planning as Van Eesteren formulated them: 'It is the task of the town planner to study and to prepare the reorganisation of our cities and the rational destination, repartition and

habitation of the ground.'[631] By Van Eesteren's influence in the C.I.A.M. the ideas of 'De Stijl' have been spread over the whole world and have found realization in Soviet Russia as well as in the United States, everywhere increasing humanity's chance for better living and greater happiness.

'De Stijl's' influence has indeed been widespread and far-reaching. It has influenced many domains of life and it has greatly contributed to create order and harmony, to promote brightness and clearness in surroundings often chaotic. But is has brought into existence as well a merely outward application of its principles, a kind of 'Stijl' mannerism. Van Doesburg was well aware of this fact as early as in 1925: 'Where didn't "De Stijl" make its influence felt? But hasn't it often been an evil influence? And what is the reason:

1. that this influence is secondary and effected by those who, though hostile to the original idea, have borrowed the exterior form without understanding the spirit, thus systematically cultivating a quadratic baroque (.....);
2. that it won't do to use the exterior forms of the new as a recipe, in order to produce decorative and applied arts'[632] (the pun cannot be translated: the plural of art in Dutch also means 'tricks').

Indeed, there has been - and still is - a lot of decorative pseudo-Stijl production, ranging from the downright odious to the ridiculous.

But on the other hand, 'De Stijl' has influenced the general aspect of everyday life by its effect on the various domains of applied artistic production. Its important deed of purification in all these fields consisted of reducing the artistic ambitions - or pretentions - of the often self-styled artists and in imposing rules for objective order. In the 10th anniversary number of *De Stijl* Domela stresses this idea: By consistent elaboration and by facing facts we have realized that painting comes to an end and will be absorbed in the surface of the wall. Therefore we turn to three-dimensional space, in order to divide it constructively by colour, as equally as in painting. Thus we enter the domain of 'applied art' and there we form a group which builds up constructively, starting directly from utilitarian notions, in opposition to others who only aim at 'decorative work'.[633] In this way 'De Stijl' and its offspring have purified and reformed many aspects of everday life: from its contribution to the purification of the contemporary interior, to the bright and clean aspect of many examples of typography, window display and advertising. Almost every reaction to the mixed, confused aspect of contemporary life can be traced back to 'De Stijl' and its work of purification; almost every attempt to establish a bright and rational environment for contemporary man is, in one way or the other, related to 'De Stijl': from the design of a modern tramcar to the lay-out of an advertising folder, from the new type of pillar-box to the colours of walls and curtains in a contemporary interior.

Mondriaan has indicated this trend: 'Nevertheless, new life has been announced in our material surroundings, as well as in our private and collective life. The purification of the form and the research into the pure relations are not only demonstrated by our buildings, but by all that modern man creates:

utensils, furniture, means of communication and of transport, window-dressing, lighting for advertising purposes, for daily use, etc. All these requirements are ever so many proofs of a new culture, parallel to that of new art. And life itself shows us an identical way: the culture of the pure relations is going to annihilate all that which opposes the equivalent relations we have to create,'[634]

Yet, 'De Stijl's' influence started to be less visible in the early thirties of the century. The most important reason for this fact can be found in Van Doesburg's death: with him the movement had lost its dynamic force, its source of inspiration and animation. During the 14 years of 'De Stijl's' existence the personality of Van Doesburg had been a constant guarantee against any decrease of vitality. Without him 'De Stijl's' pace slackened and 'De Stijl' had lost its centre of gravity. The influence and expansion of 'De Stijl' had indeed been almost entirely due to Van Doesburg's activity and without him its expansion ceased and its influence diminished.

Another reason for 'De Stijl's' waning influence may, perhaps, be found in the development of modern science. When 'De Stijl' started in 1917, it could, to a certain point, consider its activity as being in unison with contemporary science and mathematics. Modern science has since developed to an incredible extent and this development has led to increasing complication and to an image of the Universe and its laws which is less adapted to visual interpretation and to any kind of expression by simple or elementary means. The scientific image of the world, the creation of the artistic parallel of which has been 'De Stijl's' ambition, has become so utterly complicated that no layman or outsider could possibly even attempt to approach it. Besides, the method and the language of modern science have, since 1917, ever increasingly developed a less prioristic or speculative conception, which hardly agreed with the universalist tendencies of 'De Stijl'.

But the most cogent reason for a fading of 'De Stijl's' influence after 1930 may certainly be found in European political development. In the preceding pages we have seen that Germany has been the most suitable centre of 'De Stijl's' expansion; for the spreading of 'De Stijl' ideas the Bauhaus has been of great importance. The Bauhaus, however, has been one of the first victims of National-Socialist 'cultural' policy; as a result of the National-Socialist government in Thuringia, the Bauhaus had been closed as early as in 1931. In the following years, after the National-Socialist accession to power, all expressions of non-naturalist and more especially of 'Stijl' painting were severely persecuted: the two members of 'De Stijl' who lived in Germany, Vordemberge and Domela, left the country soon after 1933.

This hostility of National-Socialism is a fact which halted 'De Stijl's' influence and the further spreading of its ideas. On the other hand, it is a most significant symptom. This direct hostility has not only been inspired by the fantastically bad taste of the Nazi-leaders - Hitler first among them - in matters of art, combining the 'petit bourgeois' love for meticulous description with the 'nouveau riche' gusto for imposing dimensions, with all the appalling results of such a hybrid combination. For once the Nazi-leaders had seen the social and

spiritual meaning of a trend, the depth of which they could not by any means fathom. By some unaccountable accident, the Nazi ‘cultural’ experts, already in the early days, earmarlced everything that savoured of ‘De Stijl’ as ‘cultural (or artistic) bolshevism’ - a phrase in itself meaningless and more so when pronounced by these people. But it is not merely accidental, that a parallelism has been emphasized by the Nazi's between the Russian five-years-plans on one hand and ‘De Stijl's’ aims on the other, a fact about which we are certain, but regretfully unable to mention the exact source of.

What might have Struck them - if at least, they had the necessary knowledge - is a parallelism between a trend which has been almost constantly stressed in the preceding pages and some lines from the *Deutsche Ideologie* by Marx and Engels, running as follows: ‘It has set them the task of establishing the domination of the individual over accidental facts and conditions, instead of the domination of circumstances and accidentai facts on the individual,’[635] This ambition of ‘De Stijl’ may indeed have caused the National-Socialists' hostility towards ‘De Stijl’ and the persecution of its members, though this may mean giving too much credit to the ‘cultural’ experts of the National-Socialist party. Yet, the fact in itself, that ‘De Stijl’ aimed at the creation of an orderly and equilibrated art and a similar life is one of its essential aspects, an aspect which gives historical and actual significance to ‘De Stijl’ and which we will discuss in the following pages.

Eindnoten:

595 *De Stijl*, Anniversary-number, p. 6
596 Mondriaan, Essays, p. 14
597 Bulletin Museum of Modern Art, 1948, XII 4, p. 13
598 Bulletin Museum of Modern Art, 1948, XII 4, p. 7
599 *Catalogue Stedelijk Museum*, 1949, Van der Leek exhibition
600 *De Stijl, IV*, p. 100 sq.
601 *De Stijl, IV*, p. 3
602 *De Stijl, IV*, p. 1
603 *De Stijl, VII*, p. 2
604 *De Stijl, VII*, p. 3
605 *De Stijl, IV*, p. 71
606 *De Stijl, IV*, p. 75
607 *De Stijl, IV*, p. 109
608 *De Stijl, IV*, p. 112
609 *De Stijl, VI*, p. 61/62
610 Oud, Nieuwe Bouwkunst, p. 11
611 Oud, Nieuwe Bouwkunst, p. 20
612 *De Stijl*, Anniversary number, p. 103/105
613 Van Doesburg, Neue Schweizer Rundschau, 1929, p. 536
614 Gropius, Bauhaus, p. 9
615 *De Stijl*, Anniversary-number, p. 63/64
616 Van Doesburg, Neue Schweizer Rundschau, 1929, p. 536
617 *De Stijl*, Anniversary-number, p. 64
618 Barr, Cubism & Abstract Art, p. 157
619 Oud, Nieuwe Bouwkunst, p. 10
620 Gropius, Bauhaus, p. 7

621 *De Stijl, II*, p. 4
622 Oud, Nieuwe Bouwkunst, p. 17
623 Van Doesburg, Neue Schweizer Rundschau, 1929, p. 537
624 *De Stijl*, Anniversary-number, p. 56
625 *De Stijl*, Anniversary-number, p. 56
626 Oud, Nieuwe Bouwkunst, p. 21
627 Oud, Nieuwe Bouwkunst, p. 21
628 Oud, Nieuwe Bouwkunst, p. 12
629 Oud, Nieuwe Bouwkunst, p. 30
630 *De Stijl*, Anniversary-number, p. 56
631 *De Stijl*, Anniversary-number, p. 96
632 *De Stijl, VI*, p. 108
633 *De Stijl*, Anniversary-number, p. 91
634 Mondriaan, Art & Life, here, p. 228
635 Marx-Engels, Die Deutsche Ideologie, Berlin, 1932, p. 416 sq

6 de Stijl as a signpost

From 1917 onward, the artists of ‘De Stijl’ have worked and battled in an isolation which has hardly ever been ‘splendid’. Only a few faithful admirers, among which Mr. Slijper, Mr. Sweeney a.o., have ever attempted to break into the magic circle of solitude and lack of understanding. From 1917 onward, the artists of ‘De Stijl’, those who belonged to the ‘group’ and those who, without belonging to it any longer, worked according to its inspiration, lived in anivory tower. But soon enough, this ivory tower proved to be a very lighthouse. Far from the stir of artistic business, inaccessible to almost everyone, it helped modern art and modern life to steer a straight course. ‘Most rightly so’ - as Mondriaan says - ‘as man takes, by himself, the direct way, the way of progress.’[636] It is the straight road, which Le Corbusier has characterized as ‘Ia voie d'homme’ - in opposition to ‘la voie d'âne’.

The artists of ‘De Stijl’, by pointing out a straight course, by remaining on a set compass amidst the changing currents in modern art, were pioneers not only for modern art, but for modem life as well. The fact that they were striving not

only for modern painting but for a general style, should be sufficient proof that they themselves were conscious of their task and of its responsibilities. They were aware, too, of the hardships and discomforts proceeding from their task. In his retrospective article in *Circle*, Mondriaan writes about this task, the fact of 'De Stijl's' pioneering work, about its role as a lighthouse: 'For the pioneers, the social contact is indispensable, but not in order that they may know that what they are doing is necessary and useful, nor in order that collective approval may help them to persevere and nourish them with living ideas. This contact is necessary only in an indirect way; it acts especially as an obstacle which increases their determination. The pioneers create through reaction to external stimuli. They are guided not by the mass, but by that which they see and feel. They discover consciously or unconsciously the fundamental laws hidden in reality and aim at realizing them. In this way they further human development. They know that humanity is not served by making art comprehensible to everybody; to try this is to attempt the impossible. One serves mankind by enlightening it.'[637]

This is how 'De Stijl' conceived its task towards humanity, how it saw the task of modern art. Art was to be an eye-opener for humanity and no more an affirmation of already known truths. Kok has formulated this thought in the second volume of *De Stijl*: 'The work of art holds truth, it opens.'[638] And Mondriaan sets up a parallel idea when writing: 'only absolute plastics have the power to "show things as they are". Neo-plasticism in painting has been a work of enlightenment and of purification; it can influence the whole of life, as it is born from the totality of Iife.'[639]

This totality of life is meant to be the totality of modern life. Mondriaan, and with him the other artists of 'De Stijl' have always stressed the relations of their art with modem life and modern ways of production. 'We also had the idea that collective art might be possible for the future. We hoped to make the public aware of the possibilities of pure plastic art and endeavoured to demonstrate its relationship to and its effect on modern life.'[640] Modern art, springing from modem life and its way of production is, on the other hand, capable of acting on modern life by making mankind more clearly aware of its fundamental principles. 'Actually it is an expression of our modern age. Modern industry and progressive technics show parallel if not equal developments. Neo-plasticism should not be considered a personal conception.'[641]

It is Oud who has most clearly defined this development in industry and technique, by which the relation to 'De Stijl's' art is established: 'Indeed, it is nowadays no more the technical imperfection, the small imperfection of all human work (as one of our architectural reviews has recently quoted with approval) that brings about the aesthetcal emotion, but it is just the marvel of technical perfection (the grace of the machine) to bring all aesthetical striving to a determined beauty.'[642] This tendency to bring beauty to its definiteness, to eliminate all arbitrariness of the individual and casual circumstances, even of nature's changing aspects, has again and again been stressed by the artists of 'De Stijb'. 'The relative factors in our surroundings, at first dominantly natural, are

gradually taking on a mathematical aspect. Thus the absolute starts to come to shape more clearly around us. An equivalence is starting to develop between man, who is growing out of his dominantly natural condition and his surroundings. Amidst all the relative facts another relativity is slowly growing, in which the absolute takes shape as well. Greater equilibrium already shows the essence of future times. There the striving for the extremes is abolished: equivalence between the relative and the absolute is possible. But equivalent relations of the relative and the absolute have been realized much more purely than in our surroundings, in art, in the realm of intuition. The most liberal of all arts, painting, could be the most consistent.'[643]

Art is thus conceived as a guide for humanity, as a sign-post on mankind's way towards further perfection. This is the meaning of Mondriaan's Utopia, this is the aim of Van Doesburg's striving for realization. 'De Stijl' has assigned an entirely new task to the plastic arts: they were no longer to harmonize, to visualize and to propagate a period's (or a social group's) well-established beliefs and actions, but their predominant task was to be to lead the way towards a brighter, a more consciously appreciated future for mankind. The plastic arts - and painting first among them - were to open new horizons to humanity. Van Doesburg in his poignant style, explains these ideas as follows: 'The new need not necessarily be pleasant. It can be defined as the startling discovery of a new dimension within ourselves(...) (all who have made a flight by airplane will remember the new way of physical vision and the "emotion" resulting from it).'[644]

Art verges on the realms of science, of discovery. And as with many scientific discoveries, it is at first quite obscure and unacceptable to the layman. As a matter of fact, this development seems to deepen the gap between the artist and his public. But on the other hand, the artist's self-assigned task as a guide bridges the distance between him and humanity as a whole. The artist's discoveries, created for the benefit of humanity, will at first not be accepted - a fate they share with so many scientific discoveries and inventions: vaccination, hygiene, etc. and innovations of a cultural order, such as compulsory education. But all these innovations have been accepted in due course and by now they belong to the general pattern of our culture. It is a long way leading from the work of the pioneers to the generally accepted style, that has always been the aim of 'De Stijl' artists.

From the very beginning they were well aware of the fact that their pioneering work would not allow them to see the ultimate outcome of their striving. Mondriaan has explained his views on this subject in the first volume of *De Stijl*: 'In a period without culture the future style can be recognized in the way of expression that is the clearest and most direct reflection of the universal - though it may only appear in a few. In a period without culture an artistic expression is not to be considered the style of the future for its being the expression of the masses: as long as civilisation does not appear universally, the expression of the masses will show characteristics that are obsolete. Only in a period of genuine civilisation we may expect a general similarity of artistic expression.'[645] And

he applies these theoretical ideas to his own period and to the future of 'De Stijl's' pioneering work: 'A certain culture, a certain stage of development of the universal in the masses, can only become visible in a certain period, after having ripened and been prepared in a preceding period by and in the individual. Style appears after having existed for a considerable time. Thus style is already visible, even in a period without culture: we do not need to wait for a period of culture in order to recognize style in the individual. Though our period is without culture (culture here must be understood as the unity of masses) the principles of a culture have already been developed and pronounced by individuals: they stand ready as to appear as culture - culture, that will manifest itself artistically as a new style.'[646]

The artists of 'De Stijl' have pledged themselves to the task, to the adventure of being the pioneers of style to come. They were conscious of the fact that this pioneering work could only be done by individuals; that the artist's clearsightedness and sensibility were required to accomplish this task. Yet they knew and continued to stress, that there was no greater danger to threaten the creation of a style to come, than to indulge in individual emotions and moods. The preparation, the burgeoning of a style to come, demanded an absolute selfdenial. The individual was only to be considered as the fertile soil in which the future style was ripening. And this idea should not only be applied to the individual artists, but to the different (individual) arts as well. The preface to the first volume of *De Stijl* already formulates these leading thoughts, which persist during the entire history of 'De Stijl': 'As soon as the artists in the different plastic disciplines will have come to the recognition of the fact that they are, in principle, compeers, that they have a common language to speak - from this moment onward they will no longer jealously cling to their individuality. They will serve the universal principle, on yonder side of the limiting individuality. Byserving the universal principle, they will as if spontaneously, produce an organic style. For the spreading of beauty, a spiritual community, not a social one, is needed.'[647]

The essential lines in this paragraph are the words stressing the necessity - and the Virtual existence - of one universal artistic language. The creation and the perfection of this language has been 'De Stijl's' great and pre-eminent aim. That was how they considered the style, they were to create: as a valid, objective and usable plastic language. And 'De Stijl's' great adventure is the analysis, the discovery of the structure, and finally the definitions of a grammar of that language. A similar task has never before been undertaken with such rigour, with such uncompromising consistency. And the search for the greatest common denominator revealed an aspect which then became 'De Stijl's' leading principle: equilibrium. On its discovery, on its chemically pure isolation, the entire grammatical system of the future language of forms has been based.

Indeed, a perfect language or a conclusive grammar is no guarantee of a work of art, of a work of poetry. Neither can any plastic style prejudice the quality of artistic production. But it is here that 'De Stijl's' generai attitude towards life and towards culture comes in: the work of art is no more considered as an aim

in itself, as a peak of human evolution, but as a means for the further evolution of mankind. Van Doesburg has well described this missionary task assigned to art by 'De Stijl' artists: 'Everything that separates humanity will be abolished in the art to come. The artist will be the unifying element, because the base of his activities is no longer an emotion which differs individually, but because this base is an emotion, general to everyone. He will break down all boundaries that have hampered him to express spontaneously these profound emotions.'[648]

In these lines a revolutionary change as to the social task of the artist has been sketched. The artist ceases to be the historian of his period - he no longer follows the events, historical and cultural, but he is taking an active share in the making of human history. From an onlooker, he has become an actor on the historical stage of humanity.

This conception of art and of the artist is indeed new and quite revolutionary. It might lead - as has been pointed out before - towards a striving for the liquidation of art as a separate field of human activity. Wils has stressed this point in the first volume of *De Stijl*. 'Modern art wants to address man directly, it wants to be universal. The artist, as an individual operating separately, must be eliminated. He will live among and with men and he will give shape to the spirit of the age in a form that will be generally comprehensible.'[649]

This revoiutionary conception of the artists's task towards human society may be one of the reasons, why the ideas of 'De Stijl' have met with so much resistance, why they have been opposed not only in their native country, but even have been persecuted by dictatorial regimes... and why they survive. Today's conception of the artist and his cultural task is still too much linked up with the 19th Century individualist ideas, considering the artist and his work as the flower (and the aim) of a long cultural development, than that it will accept without opposition a conception as 'De Stijl's' which upsets all the foundations of its doctrines. Art (and the artist) have been worshipped until today as the ultimate result of our evolution, but they have not been recognized as an active force in the history of humanity. And it is just that what 'De Stijl' stresses with peremptory force. Wils again gives the key in an article in the first volume of *De Stijl*: 'Culture is a spiritualisation of nature. In this process of spiritualisation or deepening the human spirit plays an active, fertilizing part and nature is passive, receiving, being fertilized.'[650]

It is clear as well, that by taking such a definite and combative stand against the traditions of the 19th Century, 'DeStijl' must have felt even more fervently its task as a pioneer of a future, universal culture. Quite a lot of van Doesburg's polemics are due to this fact and his panegyric on the spiritual colour of his epoch can be accounted for by his firm belief and his conviction to fight for a new conception of art where, after a thorough purification of all traditions, the artist would be able to take an active part in the fate and the future of humanity: 'White! There is the spiritual colour of our times, the clear-cut attitude that directs all our actions. Not gray, not ivory white, but pure white. White: There's the colour of the new age, the colour which signifies the whole epoch: ours, that of the perfectionist, of purity and of certainty. White, just that. Behind us the

"brown" of decay and of academism, the "blue" of divisionism, the cult of the blue sky, of gods with greenish whiskers and of the spectre. White, pure white.'[651]

This forceful hymn to a new era can only be fully understood by realizing that 'De Stijl' was, indeed, more than a temporary movement of purification. In the 14 years of its existence, 'De Stijl' has brought forward new ideas, a new approach towards art and towards nature; it has sketched a new task for the arts in human society and it has greatly changed and upset the traditional views concerning the artist and his work. It has, above all, realized some outstanding work in art, in painting as well as in architecture, sculpture and interior decoration, etc., which proves more than all theoretical argument the validity, of its attitude in regard to the problems of the plastic arts. All the views and conceptions of 'De Stijl' were, as we have seen, deeply rooted in its native country and in its spiritual and social circumstances at a given period. But 'De Stijl' is more than a merely local Dutch movement. It may rightly be considered - and its influence all over Europe and America is sufficient proof - as the Dutch contribution to modern art, a contribution by which the Netherlands gave evidence of the survival of many essential artistic qualities; 'De Stijl' is a contribution to modern art which, in our opinion, could have originated from no other country than the Netherlands.

But 'De Stijl' had and still has, an international purport. Its aims, its discoveries reach much further than its native Dutch horizon. More than 'De Stijl's' deeds and acts, its significance to human society is of importance. It is undeniable that 'De Stijl' has put forward most clearly and forcefully, in early 20th Century history, the question of the relation of the arts to human society. It has not only posed the question, but it has, by its works and writings, given an answer to it. The paintings of the three original painter-members, Van Doesburg, Mondriaan and Van der Leck, with their rigid and healthy discipline, the architectural works of Oud, of Rietveld and of Van Eesteren, as much as its town-planning, are so many answers to the question and all the members of 'De Stijl' have contributed, by their work, to those answers. In the writings of *De Stijl* the relation of art and life is the ever-recurrent problem: from the articles of Van Doesburg, Mondriaan, Van der Leck, Kok and Oud in the first numbers of *De Stijl*, from the introduction to the first volume and the first manifesto, this tenor continues up to andin the later writings of Mondriaan. It is from one of these, that the following lines, clearly putting the question and answering it at the same time, are extracted: 'In our epoch full of movement and action, and burdened, moreover, with real as well as spurious exigencies, which absorb almost completely the whole of us, the question whether this essential expression of art is one of real momentous benefit and utility to life is likely to rise. We need but turn our attention towards the distress, the discord and the lack of equilibrium of our today's existence, but get aware of the "emptiness" of our time and soon we shall be fully convinced that this essential expression of art is still necessary. Though the art of the past - considered to be a thing of beauty and not even skirting life but doomed to keep quite aloof - is no longer

desirable, yet new art is, in consequence of its new expression, still indispensable to mankind because it is liable to be its propelling force towards realizing - in life - a new beauty that will be "real" in both the material and the immaterial domains.'[652]

It is not only Mondriaan, it is 'De Stijl' which gives its answer by these words, to the essential question regarding Art and Life - a question that has become more and more crucial in the course of the 20th Century. And this answer is the more startling for its period, as it reverses an old device, honoured and obeyed for centuries all over Europe and especially well-known in Amsterdam, consecrating art to the service of nature: 'Natura artis magistra'. 'De Stijl's' device, meant to be the device for the future, yet springing from the past, could run thus: 'ARS NATURAE MAGISTRA'.

Eindnoten:

636 *De Stijl, I*, p. 129
637 Mondriaan, Circle, p. 44
638 *De Stijl, II*, p. 6
639 *De Stijl, VI*, p. 6
640 Mondriaan, Essays, p. 14
641 Mondriaan, Esayss, p. 14
642 *De Stijl, III*, p. 14
643 *De Stijl, VI*, p. 84.
644 *De Stijl, VI*, p. 123
645 *De Stijl, I*, p. 17
646 *De Stijl, I*, p. 17
647 *De Stijl, I*, p. 1/2
648 *De Stijl, III*, p. 102
649 *De Stijl, I*, p. 32
650 *De Stijl, I*, p. 137
651 New York, 1947, Catalogue exhibition Van Doesburg
652 Mondriaan, Art & Life, here, p. 220

piet mondriaan
art and life

TRANSLATED BY TIL BRUGMAN (M.O.)

new art - new life
(*The Culture of Pure Relationship*)

All contemporary art is, as a rule, considered to be ‘new art’.

But first of all, is contemporary art new indeed as long as there is not in its manifestation a definite difference between itself and the art of the past? Moreover, are all of us conscious of the fact that after the elapsing of a long period of culture the plastic expression of art becomes susceptible of a mutation likely to give birth to an art of a quite different aspect?

Art itself proves us that it must needs realize a positive change in the essentials of its manifestation in order to be really new, i.e., a positive alteration in the *purely plastic expression*, which does not subsist upon a figurative representation, but has to be created by *the relations of the line and the colour or of the planes*, they compose.

By the fact of its achieving this change, art does not merely show us that such a thing is possible, but it proves too, the exigency of it.

The fine arts themselves reveal to us that their essential plastic means are none

but *line, plane and colour*. Though these means inevitably produce some form or otherwise when being composed, these forms are nevertheless anything but the essential plastic means of art. As to art these forms do exist as secondary or auxiliary plastic means only, yet by no means in order to secure a particular form. In following the aspect of nature, which brings forth the various forms, the art of the past established them however, in their particular character and in a more or less natural way, in spite of its intention to represent them merely in their plastic value.

Contrary to this past conception it is New Art that handles these forms in the way of art and not in the way of nature, i.e., New Art deals with them in their quality of plastic value only. It has realized that which the art of the past did not but try to realize. In New Art's manifestations *forms are neutral as a consequence*, and this the more so in proportion as *they succeed in approaching the universal status*.

It is in New Art only that line, plane and colour have revealed themselves *freely*, more or less.so according to its forms being more or less universal. In the art of the past, however, these plastic means were linked up with the particular form.

But just as well from the standpoint of relations New Art differs from the art of the past. Considering that the purely plastic expression is created by 'the relationships' of line, plane and colour, these means do not exist *but by their relations*. As a consequence the latter are as much to be taken into account as the former, the plastic means themselves.

In the art of the past *the relations were veiled and confused* as a result of the oppression caused by the natural form. Its composition did not exist but by the grace of the varied forms, in which. the composition was effectively lost. In New Art, on the other hand, the composition has manifested itself clearly by fonns that are neutral or universal, each form being strictly separated from the other.

The relations oppose themselves most distinctly to the plastic means, i.e., they are realized by them. In this way New Art has succeeded in that which the art of the past had been endeavouring to attain without being able to establish it.

Though, as a consequence, New Art does not - in general - distinguish itself from the art of the past but for the clear or equivalent expression of the plastic means and relations, none the less this difference has confessed to be of the highest importance to art, because it has been leading up to opening the way *to the establishing of the plastic expression in a pure manner*. Being no longer veiled in nature's aspect, New Art has been able to achieve the expression of a real equilibrium.

Although this deliverance of the purely plastic expression from nature's forms' oppression determines New Art, all modern art since impressionism has affirmed itself by frankly transforming the natural vision in so emphatic a way, that it would have been entitled to be considered as New Art in spite of all, if the art of the past had not equally transformed the natural vision.

Notwithstanding the fact that the inmost tenor of art proves to be identical in New Art and in the art of the past, their expressions stand to antipodes. The art of the past, in its state of ripeness grown towards New Art, does not even recognize the latter. And New Art finds itself to be a stranger in face of that from which it has taken its origin. Yet, this phenomenon inheres to all life indeed.

As the plastic expression of art results from the two factors following: from the plastic means (forms, lines and colours) and from the relations, both proper and mutual, we are able to envisage the evolution of art from two points of view, viz.: from the point of view of the plastic means and from that of the relations.

Thanks to these two points of view we are enabled to foresee in the whole of past art's culture a mutation towards New Art. In a way that is getting clearer and clearer in the course of this process of culture we see the new form establishing itself.

From the point of view of the plastic means we discern since the very *debut* of art's culture:

1. that art, though cloaked in the natural aspect of reality, has opposed itself against its thus being disguised by slightly transforming nature's aspect;
2. that art has withdrawn from this aspect, freed itself from it and henceforth is revealing the relations thereof;
3. that art has done away with the subjective and the natural form, consequently, has given deliverance to the relations;
4. that art, in manifesting itself by means of purified forms, fragments of them and purely constructive elements, has got rid of the oppression exercised by the particular form, and is now visualizing the relations;
5. that art, in freeing the line and the colour from the particular form, has expressed itself by neutral forms or by a universal and unparalleled plastic means and is thus steering towards equivalent relations - creating them, in other terms.

From the point of view of relations we see:

1. that, despite the natural aspect of reality, in which it has been disguised, art has tried to reveal the relations of the line and the colour, so that the natural aspect was getting to be neutralized;
2. that art has annihilated the natural aspect and the particular form by relations ever growing towards a greater purity;
3. that art has realized exact and equivalent relations in order to annihilate even the neutral or universal forms as such and, thus, has succeeded in having line and colour manifesting themselves freely.

Considering this evolution of art's plastic expression we are enabled to determine exactly New Art. To begin with, let us fix its first appearanceat the moment of *its starting to free itself from the oppressive particularity of the natural form*, i.e., *at the time that the plastic means do not anywise possess the natural aspect of things and that the relations do not follow the natural composition any longer*.

Owing to the development of the plastic expression, as indicated above, we recognize different degrees of evolution in New Art's progress. The true mutation, the new form of art, may be defined as *the pure manifestation of the line and the colour by neutral or universal forms in their pure or equivalent relations*.

In new painting we distinguish different tendencies. First of all there is the tendency of decomposing, transforming or dislocating the form - already more or less purified - to such a degree that the composition does no longer render the natural aspect. This tendency employs particular Forms, either as a whole or cut up, curved or straight lines, as well as geometrical forms. On the one side the works of Picasso and Braque, on the other side those of Kandinsky and Malevich are the most striking examples of this conception. Next to it there is the tendency of purified forms and a more or less abstract content. It is represented by the works of Leger, partly by the ones of Ozenfant and Jeanneret (purism), partly by those of Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy and Vordemberge-Gildewart, likewise by the works of the futurists (Prampolini), unless they fall back upon the figurative. Then we distinguish the tendency - chiefly Arp's creation - of neutral forms against a neutral background, in other words, of reduced forms beyond all kind of determination and, consequently, free of any particularity of the form. At the same time there is the tendency that prefers expressing itself by a rhythm of concentrical curved lines, rather than by abstract forms (Delaunay). Finally there is the tendency that seems exclusively to manifest itself by rectangular planes in colour and non-colour, though, in truth, it expresses only equivalent relations by straight lines in rectangular opposition and by primary colours. For, this sole means (the rectangular plane) annihilates itself in so far as it is a form, because of the fact that there is no opposition of other forms (Neo-Plasticism).

In sculpture corresponding tendencies are manifest and so are they in architecture.

Thus, art shows us in its secular culture that in the beginning the plastic expression of the relations of the line, plane and colour manifested itself veiled and confused, gradually evolving however, to a more and more direct way of expression. Though these two ways of expressing evidently got confounded in their transitory epochs, there is *a mutation separating them definitely* and creating thus, an art of the past and a new art.

As soon as art's culture had succeeded in the separating of them, it changed its own character too.

In all art two developments at the same time - supporting each other mutually - may be traced: the culture of the plastic means and that of the relations. But as to the art of the past these two cultures melted into each other and their actions were obscurely veiled, so that they seemed to be one single action only.

Though their actions are homogeneous at the core, in reality the development of the relations has suffered from that of the form, which obtruded because of

its being ‘particular’. Yet, from the very moment of art's endeavouring to establish pure relations, *the culture of relationships has opposed that of the particular form*. Art was in need of pure plastic means. It has found them in the neutral forms, graduaily developed by the culture of the particular form.

By doing so the culture of the particular form itself came to an end.

The culture of art has proceeded on its way. Delivered from the oppression caused by the particular forms, the manifestation of the relations has been more and more prominently brought forward. Though the cultivation of the form, either purified or neutral, continues, we are, therefore, entitled to indicate *this new development as the culture of pure relationships*.

Opposing the particular form, this culture goes straight against the culture of the past. This explains the fierce struggle between the art of the past and New Art - notwithstanding the fact that the former did engender the latter.

In the same way as New Art manifests itself nowadays in the midst of the art of the past - prolonging up to our time - we now see how in the midst of the culture of the past New Life is springing into existence. Art is able to disclose to us the way in which this New Life is going to be born. By getting rid of all *natural oppression* it will end in liberating itself *from the domination of the particular forms of all sorts* and, by then, it will equally effect *the realization of pure relationships*.

In the same way as concrete life is engaged in extending, science, philosophy and religion are, too. Dogma after dogma has been quitted and ever so strenuously a clear representation of that which is universal has been sought after.

The new conception represents the varied verities as pure relations, - all their adherent limiting impurities being strained out - and, consequently, it is able to secure their position in equivalence, so that the one annihilates the other and the ‘truth’ may be felt directly and without any tricking.

New Life is preparing for the struggle as New Art once did. In life the two cultures have turned out to be as hostile to each other as they ever were in art.

But man's new mentality stands its ground everywhere and in all respects: New Life has begun.

As art has proved to be an expression of life - and ahead of it - we may state that New Life is *the culture of pure relationships*.

Quite as it is the case in the domain of art, so far as the plastic means are concerned, it is evident that to the benefit of this New Life, our mentality must be more or less purified. Surely this is not meant in the strain of the former puritanism, but in such a way that our mind may become superior to any oppression caused by the limiting particularity of the form. It is by doing so that life will succeed in exactly the same way as art once did: *thus attaining - by means of pure relations between the individuals - their gradual freedom*, a status of true equilibrium.

It goes without saying that art has to employ the new plastic means in the way

of art, i.e., it must *effect their equivalence*. For neither the new plastic means nor the pure relations are the essence of the plastic expression of art. *The essential is the equilibrium that can be realized by these means*. And this now is the new, 'open', culture setting in, not only that of the pure relations, but equally that of the neutral form. And, as the searching for the equivalence of pure relationships *necessitates a consistently growing abstraction of the form, universal forms only are apt to be composed in a true equivalence*.

It is a consequence of this necessity that Neo-Plasticism has found its universal means of expression: the rectangular plane. When by doing so it has approached the end of the culture of the pure relations, all research, performed by means of neutral forms, has a share in the culture of pure relationships and therefore, all the tendencies, mentioned here previously, are New Art.

Art demonstrates that New Life is not in the least the simple creation of new forms and new relations in the individual, social, political and economical range, - though they will be so much the more just for all that, - but, too, that the status of purification serves only to make them more and more susceptible to the constitution of an *entirely new organization*, abolishing by its creating of equivalent relations all those particular concerns detrimental to others.

Exploring the province of fine arts' culture we come to detect - though in the different styles of the past the subject was more or less preponderant - that each of these styles has revealed the truth that not the subject does create the essential of the work's expression. Each one of these styles shows us that the purely plastic manifestation, i.e., the manifestation by the line and the colour only and by the planes they create, constitutes the work of art and that the subject and the particular form were none but secondary means with respect to the plastic expression.

At present we do not merely see the subject and the particular form rejected on account of their being primitive means of expression, - though in earlier days the subject and the particular form were of ever so great an importance to the work of art, - but we now see moreover, that for all things they are done away with because they are the limitators of this expression.

Up till now their being displayed has been prolonged by tradition and necessity, as well as by convention and inertia.

The mentality of the past was in need of these means, which were at first closely connected with the plastic expression. The fact that this state of affairs could go on for so long a time, and is still continuing of our days, can only be understood, if we do relate this phenomenon to the whole of human culture, which does not but crawl forward towards the liberation from primitive conceptions. Or, whilst keeping in mind that our intellect often tampers with the truth, so that it is possible for man's intuition to attain its evolution without this being realized for centuries to come.

The effort of New Art to suppress the subject and the particular form proves

that they are a source of weakness and obscurity to our new mentality. To the spirit of the past, on the other side, the plastic means were, - if not brought forth by them, - at any rate closely connected with those two and fully estimated to be elevated and revived by them. If we decline to consider the new reality to be the poor error of some of us and know it for being an expression of New Life, art shows us that man has changed. In case New Art should be a mere misunderstanding, it is hard to catch how it is so strikingly in keeping with so many a new movement of life. Neither would it be clear that it holds its own here so well nor that it is even extending in an ever broader field of life.

Yet, not all are to be found fault with who do not suppress the subject and the particular form. All art is necessity, though this necessity is not yet the same for all of us. Moreover, if we speak of an art and of a mentality of the past and, on the other hand, of a new art and of *a new* mentality, this does not include that all those who love or make figurative art and cherish limitarian forms in life are consequently behind the times. The mentality of the individual may be well ahead of its expression. It is quite possible that one belongs to New Life's era, but has not yet come up with its manifestation so far. Or it may be that one realizes it in some other department of life. Very probably these people will reach the exact expression of New Life even quicker than those who are not convinced of the necessity of exact and neutral means in art and do not but superficially apply them. And, moreover, there are a good many human beings that are not acquainted with the tenor of the new plastics or, may be, not conscious of it. In life every sincere effort aims at human evolution, and so it does in art. Still, whilst observing things thoroughly, we come to learn that after all there is only *one way of evolution, absolutely identical as to life and to art*.

When we perceive that the plastic expression of art - which is universal - is ridding itself in an ever greater measure of the subjective, in liberating the form from its individual limitations, we get aware of the fact that our mentality is *delivering itself from the oppression caused by that which is individualistic and is tending towards that which is universal*.

This fact, proved to us by art, is of the utmost importance to life, because it tallies exactly with the basis of progress and indicates the way of it.

When we follow plastic art's culture, it teaches us that - not only so at its first appearance, but even in all figurative art - the purely plastic expression was wedded to a subject. The conscious base of religious art was the belief in the existence of a god or gods. This base created and determined the subject and by means of the latter - for a good deal - the work itself. Profane art, based on concrete life, chose other subjects, bringing about a quite different kind of beauty. But in all cases the subject was determined, established and limited and this the more so in proportion to the subject representing an action more strictly determinated. Thus we come to see that in the course of our plastic culture, which is centuries old, the subject was gradually getting confined to a simple reproduction of things the way they are after their proper nature. Although romanticism stuck for a still longer time to representing the subject in

movement, realism got rid of this view, whilst representing nothing but heads, figures, landscapes and still-lives. By concentrating on the things themselves, in their universal aspect consequently, realism was the direct base, the *debut* of New Art.

Nevertheless we should always keep in mind that all art of the past was instrumental to the edification of New Art and that the whole of the different qualities of past art brought forth New Art.

The phenomenon that art at the first was not only closely coupled to the subject, but that it even was its offspring, is fully explained, as soon as we detect how man at the outset was not simply instinctively in need of creating, but equally of establishing, describing and explaining in order to deliver himself from that which he saw, felt and thought. He wanted to create, but his conception of reality was still in a primitive state and by far too much chained up to his natural instinct. Notwithstanding this, even under these conditions true art may be the result - though in a primitive way - because of the plastic expression prevailing in the work. Instances of this we have in the works of art of the 'savage' and in those of children. It is the same phenomenon as will be brought about in a period of greater or lesser primitivity by the influence of a superior force. Monarchs, saints and initiates did enhance the intuition of the peoples. In Egyptian and Greek art, as well as in the art of the Primitives, instances abound.

If in a more or less primitive period the intellect intervenes and one starts calculating, thus comparing the work of art to nature, - i.e., the moment man intends to follow nature's aspect, - the pure plastic expression dwarfs and dwindles. In the art of the lunatic too, we detect that the intellect is likely to tamper with this expression.

At the outset of plastic art's culture, when man was conscious of the *particular* expression, the *universal* expression of reality (in art: the plastic expression) was not but intuitively felt and manifested: the true creation of art was only realized *in spite of* the artist.

But, precisely because of this, the work of art might be a masterpiece.

Leading man up to a status of completer consciousness, human progress could not but bring about *a degeneration of the plastic expression in itself and a perfection of the natural form*. However, developing the intuition of man, this progress produced at the same time an evolution of the plastic expression. In this way it happened that art attained in the end *a conscious expression of pure plastics*.

Reflecting upon this, we understand that it is only the primitive intelligence that mars the pure plastic expression. The cultivated intelligence, on the contrary, creates a superior art. It is the beautiful object of art's culture to have finally realized the complete union of intuition and intellect in the work.

The moment we recognize the progress of art in the progress of concrete life, we see clearly that the perfectioning of all kinds of particular forms - quite as

the progress in science en technics - was not but a seeming hindrance to the moral evolution and to that of the intuition. We even come to discover that they attain to a form of new life, on the contrary, a free life, apt, it too, to realize moral life *in a true way*.

Though in art the creating of that which is the essential of the plastic expression manifests itself always intuitively, it is, however, quite logical that this manifestation has been established and controlled consciously in our epoch. Supported by all technical experience in the line of plastic arts, by all aesthetical analysis as well, man in our days has come to understand the reasons why the manifestation of the plastic expression is either established in a clear or in a confused way. It has been perceived that by his copying nature he inevitably lands in a more or less *vague* representation of the purely plastic expression, which can only be realized through *a rhythm of continuous opposition of lines and colours*.

His attention fixed on the subject to begin with, afterwards fully preoccupied by the great variety of forms, the artist of the past neutralized both of them through the relations of values and dimensions he used to borrow from nature. Through the intermediary of these dimensional relations a composition of forms was established. But it did not manifest itself in an independent way, neither as to the subject nor as to the natural aspect of reality. Though the artist did not avail himself of the means adequate to a pure plastic expression, he none the less wanted to establish a perfect harmony as well. This impossible task required a truly exerting endeavour, of which the art of the past acquitted itself most admirably.

When making use of a subject - and even in applying a mere particular form - plastic art always displays a descriptive, literary side, thus veiling the purely plastic expression of the line, the colour and the relationships.

Though it is possible to generalize the particular representation, still it is - in *any* form whatever - an individual expression, in consequence of its unbalanced relations being opposing the universal expression of art's true tenor. This was the cause of its not being able to live up to a direct manifestation of this very content in the days of the past. But in spite of its figurative representation the art of the past teemed already with the intentions of pure plastics. The realization of this effort to an ever greater degree of veracity was the true tenor of the culture of the art of the past, prolonged unto our own time and giving birth to New Art.

The subjective - i.e., all figurative art springing from the particular form, - *is the form* that by the very structure of its own character, even after the suppressing of the subject still veils the pure manifestation of the plastic expression. This form, manifesting itself to the cost of the rhythm of the line and the colour, - both of them expressing in a direct way the essential of the work, - has been done away with by New Art. In the course of centuries the art of the past had been on its way towards this annihilation. It had been forerunning the double

task of New Art: *the revelation of pure relationships and the transformation of the particular form by reducing it*. The aim of these actions is *the liberation of the purely plastic means and the realization of the equivalent relations*. Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that both the plastic means and the relations, even in a pure state, are in no way the essentials of the work of art. As has been said above, the essential is *the purely plastic expression*, created 'through' these means.

That which art conveys and makes us see and feel by this purely plastic expression is difficult to determine. By it art expresses beauty, truth, goodness, grandeur and richness -the universe, man, nature.

Past aesthetics used to translate the essential expression of art by the term 'harmony'. But is this word in art's deepest sense implicative of a universal mode, and is it, thus, of a sweeping validity as to any epoch?

New Art is able to disclose to us that in regard to the plastic expression *its* harmony differs absolutely from the harmony of the past, in other terms: New Art has manifested the same content in a quite different way. Here we have the reason why new aesthetics do speak of 'equilibrium' and not of 'harmony'. 'Harmony', indeed, expresses a veiled condition, whereas equilibrium indicates an exact status.

Nevertheless, even in new aesthetics the word 'equilibrium' has given rise to a good deal of misunderstanding and to many an error to boot. In order to rectify these false interpretations there will be nothing for it, but to study thoroughly the plastic expression of New Art. Then it will be proved to demonstration that New Art's status of equilibrium is far from being a statical one, a state without movement, but, on the contrary, it will be shown that it is *a continuous and interannihilating opposition of equivalent elements, the latter being though, anything but equal*. On the other hand, this equilibrium does not manifest itself as a movement known to us in the range of our palpable reality, but it does so as a purely 'plastic' movement, created through the means of the oppositions of an equivalent character only.

In our epoch full of movement and action and burdened moreover, with real as well as spurious exigencies, which absorb almost completely the whole of us, the question whether this essential expression of art is one of real momentous benefit and utility to life is likely to rise. We need but turn our attention towards the distress, the discord and the lack of equilibrium of our to-day's existence, but get aware of the 'emptiness' of our time, and soon we shall be fully convinced that this essential expression of art is still necessary.

Though the art of the past - considered to be a thing of beauty not even skirting life, but doomed to keep quite aloof - is no longer desirable, yet New Art is, in consequence of its new expression, still indispensable to mankind, because it is liable to be its propelling force towards *realizing - in life - a new beauty that will be 'real' in both the material and immaterial domains*.

The exact expression of the rhythm of equivalent oppositions is able to enhance our sense of *the value of the vital rhythm* in a most thorough way and,

through its new representation, to make us somewhat aware of the actual tenor of life.

In our days it does not only rest with the fine arts to reveal to us the rhythm of the equivalent oppositions. Both the new concert music, and the american jazz above all things, as well as the modern dance too, most emphatically tend towards the establishing of it. It is in the trend of our time to be aware of the value of concrete, practical life. Let us therefore try to perfect it by the realizing of that which is the essential of human life.

In order to understand the equilibrium of New Art to the full we are bound to spare no trouble whatever as to a painstaking analysis of that which the new plastic expression draws our attention to. It then, shows us that the neutral or universal forms and their relations do create a rhythm that, owing to the structure itself of these forms, is the rhythm of the line and the colour only and of these two simply and solely in their mutual relationships.

It is merely the rhythm that realizes equilibrium and, thus determines the proper character of it. The way it actually creates this equilibrium is so subtle a process that abstaining from solving this problem is almost the only thing to do. In one way it is the mode and method of executing the application and the use of the plastic means on the other side it is the nature itself of these means and relations, which compose the work of art.

Never in itself was the rhythm of the line and the colour - consequently the rhythm stripped of all particularities of the form - represented in a profound and vivid way by the art of the past. In the few cases, in which the art of the past did establish it because of its leaving alone the subject, the rhythm happened to turn out to be brought about in a superficial manner, viz., in the way of a mere ornamentation. And even then the rhythm used to be linked up with some particular form or otherwise. Nevertheless, as in Byzantine art, there were some rare exceptions, in which the rhythm - in spite of these forms - did express itself to such a high degree of profundity, that the work, rising above any such a thing as ornamentation, reached the level of true art. Therefore, in spite of the centuries separating them from New Art, these works have a most direct point of contact with it.

Through the means of neutral or universal forms and their pure relations New Art has constituted a rhythm free from all oppression by the form. Premising the fact that in all New Art the rhythm dominates, and that the neutral or universal forms do not, New Art's plastic expression is stronger to the new mentality, than art's expression of former times was ever apt to be.

Notwithstanding this, the various tendencies of New Art reveal the rhythm in different ways. All seek for expressing, consciously or unconsciously, *the principal opposition of the rhythm*, i.e., the two opposing aspects as they are found, e.g., in the two dimensions (the height and width) of a work of art. In approach-

ing *the equivalence of these two oppositions* not only an exact equilibrium in the work will be accomplished, but, moreover, its maximum strength can be attained.

Among the divers tendencies of New Art there are two that seem to oppose each other by the different character of their rhythms. They are: the tendency expressing itself through a rhythm established by concentric curved lines, and the tendency manifesting itself through the means of straight lines in a rectangular opposition. The first accomplishes a rhythm of undulations in concentric curves, the second creates a rhythm by cadence. Though concentric curves cannot have the expression of the opposition, these two tendencies are not contradictory, but by their application of different means; because the tendency of the curves introduces neutral forms into the work, by which the same contrarious opposition is effected as is expressed by the other tendency in an exact way. Consequently both tendencies are manifestations of one and the same will at the root, their aims being equally *the searching for the equivalent contrarious opposition*.

Yet there are aestheticians who deny the value of the expression of rhythm by means of the cadence of straight lines. They are not willing to acknowledge any rhythm, but that of undulation. The fact is that they are not aware of the value of the exact expression of the contrarious opposition. Or, maybe, their attitude is only due to the still lasting influence of the past, which followed but nature and, as a consequence, expressed a more or less natural rhythm. In any case they use to give countenance ta their standpoint by alleging to the fact that also in certain masterpieces of the past this rhythm of curves can be traced. If we take the ground of a purely aesthetical analysis and neglect heeding the fact that the artist is able to create art with any means after all, we are entitled to state that the rhythm of the cadence of straight lines in rectangular opposition is a purely plastic expression and that the rhythm of the undulation of curves is more ‘natural’. For, in nature these undulations manifest themselves; e.g., we detect them after having thrown a stone in a pond, in the transverse section of a tree-runk, etc. etc. The cadence of straight lines in rectangular opposition, however, has to be created by man. There is no reason whatever to believe this cadence to be any more monotonous than the rhythm of undulations: both expressions, indeed, have one and the same exigency, viz., *a variable measure*. But that of the straight lines is able to express itself in an *exactly equivalent way*.

Art has shown us in the course of its culture that precisely for the sake of this sticking to the natural aspect the equilibrium did not manifest itself in a clear way because of the simple fact that in such a case the rhythm was not realized by pure plastic means, but through the intermediary of the particular form.

It is evident that primitive man, living in harmony with nature, was in tune with this natural rhythm, resulting in his trying to express it in art. Nevertheless, primitive man must logically bear within himself the germ of mankind at its

apogee and, consequently, its rhythm at this summit too, though be it more or less hidden as long as the human rhythm is dominated by the physical feature. In course of this evolution towards the status of ‘man’, he himself, thus, is opposing the natural rhythm to an ever higher degree. This is the cause of his lack of equilibrium, inward and outward. The more man is progressing, the more the rhythm in his innermost self will assert its influence and equally the more his strength to bring it into equivalence with his physical rhythm-likewise transformed meanwhile-will be increased. In this way a ‘rhythm of man’ is going to be created, being material and immaterial at the same time. The more these two oppositions of his rhythm will be counterpoised, the more man will attain to a state of equilibration and become integrally human.

It is evident that during the whole of its evolution the human rhythm will oppose the outward natural rhythm, and this the more so according to man's own progressing. Therefore it is logical that man has transformed-as far as he was able to do so-the natural aspect and the natural life in order to create a rhythm, outside of himself.

This effort can be retraced in art, and to some extent it accounts for the imperious necessity of the transformation it has been submitting the natural aspect and the particular form to, though be it in an abstract and free domain. But it is even of a much greater importance that man should transform the rhythm of life, of which he participates. Though it is, therefore, logical that man-whilst evolving-has tried to reduce nature's aspect as well as the physically dominating feature of life, he is not continuously conscious of this necessity.

There are even lots of people opposing a palpable reality and a non-natural life. On the other side it is man that evolves. Often people do not detect the progress of man in the immaterial range. They lack the sense of the ‘real’ and, evidently because of this, they do not attain the status of man, being *integrally* human, in other terms: they do not reach the status of complete evolution. But life itself advances in spite of all, and the culture of the material aspect accomplishes its line of evolution as well as the immaterial aspect does.

The material aspect is diminishing in contrast to the immaterial aspect which is gradually intensifying.

By its *interiorization of the natural aspect and its exteriorization of the aspect ‘man’ in the work of art*, art acquaints us with this phenomenon. In spite of all its shortcomings during the course of the culture of the particular form, art discloses to us that the progress of civilization has been fulfilling its task *of reducing the oppression from the side of the physical aspect-which is ‘natural’ precisely because of its cultivating the material feature of life*. In this train of thought the problems of alcohol and tobacco present themselves, too, as being absolutely different from the way they used to be envisaged. *It is by our transforming the physical aspect (in the sense of a reduction) that the latter recreates itself into a superior aspect*. Only then it is that its rhythm, thus accelerated, is going to tend towards being in full equivalence with the immaterial rhythm of man, having equally evolved.

Consequently, there is no reason whatever to rebel against the accelerated rhythm of our epoch. Its tempo, quicker than that of the natural rhythm, is explained by the fact, - as we have been taught by science - that any 'life' more inward or more refined possesses an increasingly accelerated vibration.

As a consequence, we ought, on the contrary, even *to revolt against all those limitations, occasioned by the oppressive forms, of which life is composed*, because - exactly as it is the case in art - *these limitations cause the disequilibrium of life*. Moreover, equally on the same footing as in art, the forms liberated, i.e., purified, will have to be raised to the *status of mutual equivalence* by means of pure relations. *The double action of art may be traced anywhere in life*.

Therefore it is of considerable importance to mankind that art has manifested the rhythm of constant, though variable, opposition of the two principal aspects of all life in an absolute *exact* way. The rhythm of the straight lines in rectangular opposition indicates *the necessity of the equivalence of these two aspects in life: the equal value of the material and immaterial aspect, of the masculine and feminine, the collective and the individual, etc., etc.* Quite as the vertical line possesses another character than the horizontal one, the two aspects in life have their proper and opposite characters. But not lesser the same as in art, these lines have their different dimensions: the individuals and their collectives are of a different vigour or grandeur. *Art proves us that life is approachable to a real equilibrium through the means of an equivalence of its opposite aspects even in spite of their different features*.

Just as the rhythm of the cadence of the straight lines in rectangular opposition communicates to us the tenor of the rhythm of art, this simple rhythm clearly discloses to us the content of the profound rhythm of all that exists. To some extent it unveils to us the real life - which is at the core of man and the essential of our practical life. Simple though this rhythm may be, it nevertheless cannot achieve its complete realization in man as long as he has not attained the status of integral humanity, i.e., the equivalence of his two aspects.

This real life bears no supernatural feature whatever, nothing metaphysical is at the root, but it maintains itself by the oppressing of the physical aspect and the particular forms, by limiting the material and the immaterial as well. This real life is the base of our practical life and, consequently, of both the life of the past and New Life. By the latter no other life is meant, but that which we virtually know for its having been delivered from the natural and primitive oppression and for its constituting the pure relations: conclusively, a superior status of actual life.

Equally as art is drawing nearer and nearer to the pure expression of its true rhythm, life is getting closer and closer towards realizing the true rhythm of life. Thus, this real life will not always remain on the imaginary plane. Though its very fulfilment transposes us into the obscurity of a rather far future, it, nevertheless, does realize itself. Because of this it is of the utmost importance that in

the midst of our practical life - through and in which it comes to its realization - we never should lose sight of this real life.

Art proves us that the true realization of real life requires: *individual freedom*. New Life is going to attain this liberty in the material and immaterial range of life. In the status to come, thus, joining his fellowmen by means of equivalent mutual relations, the individual will not in the least suffer from lack of freedom, exactly because of these very relations.

New Art grants *an independent existence* to the line and the colour in the sense of their being *neither oppressed nor disfigured by the particular form*, but of their shaping *their own limitations by themselves and this in the exactest appropriation to their proper nature*. Thus, society will equally grant *an independent existence, homogeneous to its proper character*, to every individual in future New Life.

In its end art shows us that the individual freedom - an 'ideal' until now - will be once realized in the far future. This freedom, however, requires that status of evolution of man, in which he does no longer abuse of his liberty. Is this abusing, perhaps, the reason why actual life does not impart us freedom? And, could not it be the ground, too, for tyranny being still tolerated?

Due to man's present inequality the one of us suffers from the other. Nothing but the developing, educating and cultivating of mankind can free us from this affliction. They are the only mediums for our attaining individual freedom, because they push us forward towards mutual equality.

As the independence of cultivated individuals is susceptible of creating a superior life, the lack of independence in the past - and in our days as well - accounts for the retarding of human evolution. If we only look unbiasedly for the cause of nearly all stains on our social and private life, we soon detect that the state of dependency - in which we virtually lose ourselves - is at the bottom of each of these deviations. It is not always human cowardice, weakness or wickedness that leads man to dishonest deeds or forces him into disastrous situations. On the contrary, as a rule it is *the necessity of securing his own livelihood that evokes all these calamities*.

Especially the material or immaterial dependency brings about the decadence of life, the degeneration of man and the delay of human progress.

One of the worst vices of man is the exploitation of his fellowmen. From lack of energy or from incapacity of building up his proper existence by his own strength, he is after the assistance of the others. If, when exchanging equivalent values or virtues, one makes up for the values or virtues accepted, there is no fault to find with. But, commonly, the others are abused of, they are taken advantage of, whilst they are being exposed to suffering from this mean attitude. In our to-day's society the exploitation of the others is practised in so cunning a way that this vileness almost manages to remain unpunished. It is not even

possible to defend oneself against such machinations. Still, they are felonies, no lesser than those which are ever so severely punished. The exploiting of others is most indeed a theft.

But no protesting is likely to change for the better this detestable social situation, which is guilty of allowing our mutual exploitation. Nothing but life itself will do away with this abuse. The progress of civilization - though often effecting it - will render it impossible in the end.

Warranting man an independent existence in the material as well as in the immaterial domain of life is the most urgent task, to which we have, thus, to apply ourselves first of all.

New Life will never liberate man, but for his continuously cultivating of the individual and his mutual relations. By this culture the real life, existent in man's inmost being, is realized to an ever higher degree in our concrete life. Because of this real life being universal, man is entitled to tend to it, and it is equally his duty to work towards its future realization.

As it has been symbolished by the Adam of the biblical paradise in so marvelous a way, perfect man has a right to live without worry, even without work. It is under these conditions only that man will ever reach the state of really free breathing, i.e., of his getting aware of his rhythm being homogeneous with the vital rhythm and, thus alike everywhere and in all. The contrarious, constant and cadenced opposition of this rhythm once being balanced, man will live in a perfect equilibrium.

In fact, life is simple in its essence. Though it is growing more and more complicated, still simplicity need not be lost.

Complexity requires perfection, simplicity being the perfect state of man.

In following the rhythm of the two contrasting oppositions of the straight line, we may say that real life in man's inmost being is but an action of balanced opposition, being - just as the double movement of respiration, e.g., - contrasting and complementing at the same time. In truth, it is the pure expression of the vital rhythm, determined by Dr. Jaworsky as the double movement of interiorization and exteriorization, and which was indicated by the wisdom of the ancient world as the actions of expansion and compression or limitation. It is interesting to follow Dr. Jaworsky with respect to this phenomenon, when he says:

‘These two movements of interiorization and exteriorization are combined and they counterbalance without their ever confounding. And this perpetual rhythm, this complexity without confusion of the two contrasting currents can be retraced everywhere in life.’

It is only in man integrally human, i.e., in man on the pinnacle of human culture, that this balanced rhythm will be realized in the material and immaterial domain. Because of its being freer than life, art has already been able to manifest it.

Man integrally human is the perfect primitive human being having come to consciousness. Adam, the perfect primitive man, was not conscious of life.

Therefore, how could he have contrived to realize it without this consciousness? In order to arrive at consciousness man wants culture, experience and knowledge. Such is the tenor of every man's life from the cradle to the grave.

In order to gain experience and knowledge man is in want of a total opposition. As it has been shown by the creation of Eve in the biblical version, primitive man was not only in need of an opposition outside of himself - contrasting and at the same time homogeneous - but equally he was in want *of an overturning of his balanced status*. In this way he was getting *conscious of his own duality*, i.e., *of the opposition peculiar to his own rhythm*.

After having become unbalanced in the course of its evolution, the reciprocal action of the two oppositions of the human rhythm will again attain to the equivalence of its oppositions and, by doing so, regain the equilibrium of this rhythm.

The rhythm of the contrasting opposition of the straight line, thus demonstrates *the necessity of separating that which seems to be a unity*, for the sake of attaining a '*real*' status. The fact that art has disclosed this to us is of the highest significance, because *this real status is the only one that is truly vivid to us*.

To our benefit art has abstracted the rhythm of the contrasting oppositions of the straight line from the particular forms. For, being a universal representation of these forms, art makes us conceive that a more or less natural reality, after its having been transformed into a more universal aspect, still remains a 'reality'.

Yet, the real life within our inmost being has not yet been brought to concreteness. Though being balanced, it is realized unbalanced inside and outside of us. Notwithstanding this, it does exist, as is clearly shown to us by the equilibrated rhythm of the contrasting oppositions of art. And it is not only *the culmination* of human life, but also *the profound* content of the life of everyone of us.

Full comprehension of the equivalence of the contrasting oppositions of the rhythm of art is able to support us in our working more consciously towards the edification of a truly human life. For, it is exactly this establishing of the equilibrium by means of the *equivalence of the two fundamental oppositions*, which man takes the least trouble of.

Yet it is this equivalence that creates individual freedom, delivers us from suffering and liberates us from the delimiting material and immaterial forms.

A general purification of the forms and relations has already been taken up to a rather considerable extent. But a thorough consciousness about the necessity of our searching towards the edification of their mutual and real equivalence is still insufficiently acquired. This is evidenced both by life and by our material environment, i.e., in a most preponderant way by modern architecture. None the less, the aspect of our palpable surroundings, is of the utmost influence on our mentality and, therefore, our applying ourselves sincerely to them is neither

superfluous nor extravagant. It is only through their equivalent relations that the oppression by the particular form is annihilated and that life's tragical feature is no longer reflected in our palpable ambiance.

In architecture as well as everywhere in the whole of our surroundings we of our days come already across purified forms, straight or running lines and pure colours. However, as a rule, they still happen to turn out to be but particular forms after all.

On the other side we see some researching going on into the more or less equilibrated relations, but this again is done by means of the particular forms. In spite of their new appearance these works, too, stand confessed of belonging to the past: they are not 'open' because of their lack of purified forms. Or, in case they are purified at all, these forms are not annihilated by their equivalent oppositions. In spite of all their qualities as to technics, construction and new materials, the impression these works offer has a depressing effect on the new mentality, because again it is carried back to the past.

The same things happen in actual life. A new mentality has been striking root and the researching into a stable equilibrium has set in. But it is no use trying to approach this equilibrium by a status of *non-equivalence, either personal or mutual*. Exactly because of this non-equivalence man's mentality remains 'closed' either *so far* as it is a limiting form in itself or *within* the limiting forms of all kinds, within all sorts of fugitive interests, that is. Virtually it is not only a question of the conventional forms being obstructive as to New Life, even the greater part of the 'new' forms, which have been established in the political, social and economical domains, are no less in its way. In this connection let us but quote that, e.g., aristocratic limitations will be seen resuscitated under the mask of democratic forms, or that most 'socialism' reveals itself to be synonymous of 'bourgeoisie'.

Even, in spite of all his immaterial perfection, modern man, though cultivated and refined, does not participate of the real new mentality, unless he is in search of this equivalence.

Nevertheless New Life has been announced in our material surroundings, as well as in our private and collective life. The purification of the form and the researching into the pure relations are not only demonstrated by our buildings, but by all that modern man creates: utensils, furniture, means of communication and of transport, window-dressing, lighting for advertising purposes and for daily use, etc., etc. All these acquirements are ever so many proofs of a new culture, parallel to that of New Art. And life itself shows us an identical way: the culture of the pure relations is going to annihilate all that which opposes the equivalent relations we have to create.

To-day already we are enabled to retrace art's effort in life. More and more a stable equilibrium is searched after in the right way. Only *the old particular forms, cultivated by tradition and cherished by man's self-interest, individual as*

well as collective, oppose this equilibrium. For some smaller space of time it has been possible to constitute an apparent harmony thus far, dissimulating the sufferings of the greater part of human beings, but it has not even been feasible to recreate this harmony of the art of the past *in life*. The fact that, notwithstanding this, a real equilibrium is gradually established, is of so overwhelming a complexity in life that it is even more difficult to illustrate it here than it is in art. But we begin to see things in an ever better light. Art, too, has not shown its true tenor, but for this very time, consequently, not before the end of its culture of the particular form, i.e., at the opening of its culture of the pure relations only. Art is ahead of life: that which we are able to detect in present life is but the preludium of New Life.

Therefore, let us observe the course of human culture in the free domain of art, to wit: *its progressing towards the real liberation from any forms and towards the equivalence of their mutual relationships* - towards a life of true equilibrium.

As in art this progress is based on the freedom from the oppression by any form, we at once understand that *the way of progress never can tend towards the reconstruction of primitive and oppressive forms* in life either.

Still, though, progress shows to be our liberator, there is nowadays a strong leaning towards a regression to primitive life. This, however, does not always brand the person in question to be of a backward state of mind and more or less primitive in his views. There are a good deal of human beings of great sincerity, cultivated, even learned, seeking -because of their rightly being disgusted at the actual state of civilized life - to orientate their minds towards a life of greater health and greater purity. They suppose it to be found in a 'natural' life. On the other hand, a good many 'modern' people, lost in ecstacy in front of the progress of civilization, are not conscious of its true content, and - unwittingly - they are 'that fond of progress' exclusively because of the advantages and the commodities it offers them. But are not those belonging to the first category somewhat in too great a haste concerning *the result* of progress, because they are impatient for its immediate effect? Is not the good created by the evil as well? It seems that they do not quite see that which progress really embraces. They lack full reliance upon life the way it manifests itself. And, indeed, if we do not see the deformations of life as ever so many transformations, it certainly is difficult to declare: all is well the way it is.

If we expect to live and see the realization of New Life already at present, it is evident that we are on the wrong track. It rests with us to exclude all speculative ideas and ideals and to try to observe clearly the virtual state of affairs: *we ought to explore reality*. If by doing so we detect that which is symptomatic of future New Life, we then shall muster up strength enough for preparing this life to come. May those who are able to discern these things give all their powers *to the cultivating of a new mentality, apt to realize equivalent relations; and devote their best endeavours to the constitution of such relations as are liable to grow, individually and mutually, more and more pure*.

To the majority of us war has become an object of repugnance. On the other side a life of true equilibration seems to many a human being akin to ‘death’. for similar reasons New Art, too, uses to be condemned by our conservative aestheticians. But the fact that New Art does not seem to be vivid to those who love figurative art is the consequence of their not perceiving *the essential expression* of new plastics. On the other hand the phenomenon, that the abstract means do not in the least obstruct its yet being manifested is fully explained by the fact that this essential expression has always been evoked by the rhythm of the relations of the line and the colour only. As soon as this rhythm is represented by the ‘artist’, the work of art cannot be ‘empty’. The same holds good as to life: as New Life is expressing the vital rhythm, it cannot resemble death.

In spite of all the deviations of our civilization - and sometimes precisely because of them - the liberating phenomenon of art is as well awakening in life. Though it is still oppressed by forms of all sorts, New Life is on its way of getting itself freed from these obstacles. In case some of us should cast doubt upon these facts or shrink from admitting that this evolution is going to continue - that it is even attaining to a superior state - the only thing for them to do is to follow the course of the plastic evolution to its very end. When doing so, they will better understand the actual, somehow disconcerting aspect of progress, by which we rise gradually above all traditional forms and, thus above the physical and psychical oppression of life. In this connection let us trace the phenomenon of the individual and mutual separation of the various forms. It teaches us that the loss of past life in all its aspects-social, economical and psychical as well - and equally the decline of the advantages of the life of old - as the intimacy of the native country and the love characteristic of those times - *are no real losses at all*, because they lead us up to a superior life.

How beautiful actual life could be indeed, if it were possible to realize the high ideals of all times, such as disinterested love, true friendship, real goodness and the like.

It is not for disdaining these ideals, but because of their being degenerated into delimiting and false forms, that the new mentality rejects them.

The mutual separation of the particular forms has been the *debut* of the independent existence of the line and the colour, because by being thus freed, they have been enabled to attain to forms above the delimiting particularities. It is exactly this separation, which discloses the narrowness of any form and pushes towards its actual deliverance. Freedom is obtained by the form through the means of a composition in equivalence with other forms and by its own decomposition: equally an act of separation.

In the same way the different qualifies, which melt into each other in the primitive human being, ought to be purified in man and be co-ordinated by an action of separation. In doing so man attains to their mutually equivalent opposition: the equilibrium of man integrally human. Art has shown us that the mutual separation of human beings, too, is necessary.

We are all liable to the inclination of leaning the one against the other. It is this propensity, which brings about man's false friendships. But man is born alone, and alone he faces death: his destiny is an independent existence. And, by its perpetual constraint, it is life itself, which does not only inspire us with the craving after, but grants us, moreover, the strength of being independent in the end.

Yet, social life is based on mutual assistance. But let us not forget that this assistance ought to be mutually equivalent and thus secure the independence of the individual.

Though this mutual separation is vital to human evolution, neither in life nor in art man should give up the delimiting forms, until he has reached the state of maturity conditional to his devoting himself to the pure relations. Then the moment of quitting them has arrived, because they do oppose the actions imperative of the individual and collective progress.

Exactly as the traditional aesthetic verities can be retraced in New Art, though expressed in a different way, New Life reveals the traditional philosophic ideas and conceptions, but otherwise practised.

After its having started with the abolition of the particular form and proceeded with that of the purified and the neutral forms, New Art has set at liberty the line and the colour: the essentials of the plastic expression. During a culture of many centuries standing the true content of man and life has been on its way of liberating itself by the abolishing of all sorts of delimiting forms. This abolition is bound to involve suffering, but, being necessary, it is inevitable. Yet, this suffering is ever twined to joy. For, abolition brings forth creation: a New Life.

Whether we conceive life as a joy or as suffering depends upon its most important feature to us: its abolishing or its creative aspect.

The beauty and the misery of our concrete life rest exactly on the fact that we cannot avoid abolition nor creation either, consequently, we cannot escape joy nor suffering either. This beauty embraces equally our yearning for freeing ourselves from all suffering. For, precisely this is our stimulus to our creating and aiming at happiness. The fact that the latter engenders suffering anew is of no importance. We ‘live’ this repetition in an eternal thirsting after happiness.

Abolition and creation are partners in constituting any transformation whatever. The latter therefore, is an action both of joy and of suffering. But exactly as in our concrete life the actions of abolishing and creating are severed, happiness and suffering here, too, are felt as things apart. This fact clouds life, but only so because of our suffering and rejoicing - creation and abolition - still being in unbalanced relations in concrete life.

In consequence of its complete unity *real life of equilibrated opposition* actually is neither abolition nor creation. Consequently, it does not express joy

or suffering either. For, as it obtains with any equivalent opposition, the one annihilates the other.

Though the evil is synonymous of abolition - thus, of suffering - and the good a synonym of creation - consequently, of happiness - in *real* life, the good and the evil abolish each other.

But in our concrete life the good and the evil are opposites. Now it is another feature of its beauty and its misery that we cannot possibly escape the one or the other either. In case we succeed in acquiring what is for our good and in conserving it too, it soon will transform into something that is bad for us. On the other hand, if we consider something as being bad, it later on may turn out to be instrumental to our welfare. In a mere race after the good however, there would not be any action: no evolution, no 'life'.

By its two aspects - the material and the immaterial features of life - our concrete life even considerably complicates the opposition of the good and the evil. Yet, it is by means of the non-equivalent oppositions that we do not only gather knowledge and insight, but feel at the same time induced to use our best endeavours in order to bring these oppositions to their mutual equivalence and to transform ourselves.

In figurative art the delimiting effects of the particular form were cloaked in the beauty of the whole piece of work. New Art has disclosed that by doing so the equilibrium was not realized in an exact way. Equally in life there still is no end of dissimulating the evil. The good, too, is veiled just as well. Thus, the happiness of life is not felt, and yet man strives at excluding all suffering. As a consequence he does not try to remedy the misery there is. Exactly because of our efforts to banish the evil existing from our minds, it overtakes us. It is almost a general feature of our mentality that we refuse to acknowledge the dangerous situations of life, e.g., our illnesses, the germs of war, etc. etc. This is one of our human weaknesses. If, on the contrary, one takes to would-be adversities and to causing distress, since happiness reigns, we have to deal with a malady. *To see reality clearly as it is and not the way we like to conceive it* that is what New Art teaches us. In its marvelous progress as to science and technics life gradually advances towards the acquisition of this capacity.

But equally New Art has revealed to us - and this is of the utmost importance - that *we ought to abstain from passing for anything we are not*. It has disclosed that frankness and sincerity are the primordial conditions of New Life.

In its end New Art (Neo-Plasticism) shows us that man will not succeed in its pure manifestation, as long as he continues to dissimulate the exact expression of the principal oppositions of the rhythm. In absolutely the same way New Life requires knowledge and insight as well as the creating of that which is its real tenor.

There is nothing so disastrous to life as the dissimulating of reality, i.e., of the truth. For, when doing so, man dissimulates life, life being the truth. Dissimulating the true content of life - even of our practical life - is up to the level

of shrinking back into a particular form, consequently, it is no better than severing oneself from life. It comes to secluding oneself. Oscillating between life and death in the obscurity of his existence, it is quite natural, however, that man confines himself into groups, into small circles of people more or less akin and of the same social standing. It is logical that man tries - be it from sensibility by nature, be it from egoism- to avoid the shocks of opposition, of which life is full. It is understandable, too, that he wants to frequent no other people, than his ‘friends’, that he does not associate, but with his comrades and that he is inclined to have as little as possible to do with humanity outside of his small self-chosen set. It seems as if man is only after amusing himself as much as he can, as if he eats, drinks, feels and thinks simply after his own fashion and his own nature. Equally he is fond of the heat and shirks the cold. He does not read anything, but that which is ‘agreeable’ to him and cropping from a sympathetic conception or a congenial sentiment. Finally, it goes without saying that this kind of mentality is anything but keen on dealing with problems and situations of an alarming political and economical character. All this is very ‘human’, if it is spontaneously springing from man's nature, from his instincts and from his intuition to ‘live’. But, if this attitude is dictated by a calculating mind and if it is meant to serve as a mask in order to hide the true state of affairs, man is no better than any of your pot-house politicians.

We should not lose sight of the fact that this kind of narrow-minded selfishness has nothing whatever to do with the egoism that furthers our evolution. For, when locking ourselves up within the small circle of that which pleases us, we separate ourselves in an unjust way from our fellow men, from universal life and from all that is beautiful, which, then, will for ever remain hidden to us.

As it is, danger draws nearer in every domain of reality and if it will not be fought against, it will be our doom.

But, quite in the same way as any other particular form, these small circles of our life, too, abolish themselves. And again we are driven from the shelter we sought for into the unprotected.

Disorientated and out of countenance as soon as we are faced with the opposition we once dissimulated, we then, feel unhappy. But we do ‘learn’ and we are bound to fight. From this struggle only the victory will come forth in the end: a new form of life, a life that is more ‘open’.

Together with its good and its evil the progress of civilization, part of our concrete life, thus entails abolition and creation, happiness and suffering. And just as in course of time these oppositions have been drawing nearer to their equivalence - meanwhile slowly annihilating themselves - progress, too, is slowly approaching a state of equivalence of the good and the evil, in other terms, it is gradually approaching a human equilibrium.

More and more the actions of creation and abolition will unite, so that, whilst abolishing, we shall be able to create more and more.

More and more the long periods of abolition and of creation will shrink; more and more peace and war will focus, so that they, too, will annihilate each

other. In our own drawing nearer towards *an equivalence of the two contrarious aspects within ourselves and outside of us*, we shall gradually be less 'lived' by life and become more capable of 'living'.

Art's culture clearly demonstrates that life is *a continuous transformation*, in the sense of a growth from the cradle to the grave. Thus, there is nothing whatever that returns in the same way, nor does it ever remain alike to its proper state. It is from this phenomenon that *life itself opposes all conservatism*, for, any new forms do not resemble each other, but for a certain space of time. And yet, do they even then possess a real resemblance? The fact that they often use to seem identical nourishes the conservative mind or, may be, causes its very error.

Decidedly the conservative action is present in life, but there it is always opposed to the creative action, so that the former annihilates itself and human progress - growth -continues.

Perceiving that the artist has been pursuing a pitiless transformation by reducing the natural aspect and the particular form to the *equivalent oppositions of the line and the colour* during the course of a secular culture, we come to see that life is an artist, a deity, *transforming* - pitiless too - *man to an ever superior status and, in the end, setting him free from all his proper limitations*.

Yet the artist does not but follow the trend of life, quite in the way any human being does. In following this trend man does not - no more than the artist ever does - reproduce the natural appearance, which never we do see transform itself, but we see him transform his material and immaterial environment... pretty often whilst protesting against it himself.

Man follows the course of life, though he is, on an average, devoid of a clear insight. Indeed, it is not before the end of a culture that - by the continuous deliverance of successive forms - the content of that culture will come to light.

The culture of life has been anything but finished. In a very few works of art however, plastic art's culture has come to a terminus. This is the reason why this art is able to enlighten us.

When considering the plastic evolution, we detect that it is a grave error to believe - as a good many people are wont to do - that the progress of occidental civilization is pushing mankind to the verge of ruin. In art the perfectioning of the various forms never has caused the destruction of its very essence. Nor has the perfectioning of the various forms of life in the material and immaterial domain caused the ruin of life either: simply and solely its primitive expression has been ruined.

The perfectioning of its technical feature was not only a necessity to art's evolution, it even was the very means to it. Equally the perfectioning of all technics is an exigency of life. Everything thrives by it: hygienics, science, etc., etc.

The perfectioning of science is one of the principal ways to human progress, enabling us to attain to a more equilibrated status. Who would deny the enormous influence, exercised by science and technology as to the international

relations of the peoples, by consequence of their developing the appliances of gas and electricity? And, though some of their evolutions do fill us with horror and leave us aghast - e.g., that of the asphyxial gases - even they are aiming at human evolution. As recently demonstrated by others, all this is going to suppress war, as war will become an impossibility because of the development of the arms themselves. *By concrete facts thus*, a real equilibrium will be created.

Day by day we are so fortunate as to witness the most marvelous discoveries and the constantly growing thoroughness of medical science. It is in this province, indeed, that we may state that knowledge brings forth happiness! The progress of medical science has already contributed a good deal towards the assuaging of the tragic side of life, towards re-establishing man in a status of equilibrium, he was bound to lose in gaining other qualities.

The progress of medicine thus, is of the highest importance to mankind. But it is evident that this progress coincides with the evolution of man, in other terms: it is time we are in need of.

Hence it follows that it is not the perfectioning of science and technics, which precludes life from being integrally human. Quite the contrary! Exactly the fact that science and technology are not yet sufficiently brought to perfection - and for all things that their organization or application is not yet perfect enough, often most terrible even -is the cause of life being at a disadvantage.

It is this *wrong* application of science and technics, which renders life actually unbalanced. The use of all those wonderful things, as machines, means of conveyance, etc., by a mentality inclined to self-interest at the cost of others, that is exactly what blackens life.

The only thing to do in order to liberate life - and we could not do any better - is to create situations worthy of mankind *by breaking or discarding the wrong organization through the means of just relations*.

In all domains of life, social and economical as well, it is no good building up new organizations in the old style, dominated by another organization. On the contrary - as it has been envisaged by true socialism - we ought to found *such organizations as will be composed of producers and consumers, based on their mutual, equivalent relations, and governed by themselves*.

The machine above all is a means necessary to human progress. It is able to replace man's brutal and primitive force, which, too, is bound to being transformed by itself in the course of human evolution.

The invention of the machine proves by itself that man had already lost a good deal of his natural force and, thus, was trying to replace it. The machine, indeed, is able to set him free from his thraldom.

Yet, this cannot be settled in a short space of time. But in the long run the machine is able to render man to himself. For, man *does not live in order to toil, but he toils in order to 'live'*.

Evidently - as it is, generally speaking, actually the case nowadays - by consequence of a bad organization of the work the machine is turning man again into a slave. Though it is quite impossible that we ever should use 'too'

much of our best endeavours with respect to our attaining a just organization, it cannot be denied that, whenever life is falling behind, this is due to man in the main, who is retardative as to evolution. And who could tell at what point of time he is in a condition to be freed? But exactly because we do not know this, we ought to take care of procuring him ample time to his own instruction, in case he is equal to it.

It is highly probable that in future - after man having evolved to a greater degree - the machine will be well used and the work will be well organized.

By the invention of the machine man has now descried his brutal force as being a feature separated from himself, and so he has come to understand it more thoroughly. So this primitive aspect of man, now opposed to him and outside of him, is going to transform him.

It is not only for the machine, but *any reality created by man himself is liable to transform him*.

In order to transform man integrally, i.e., both physically and psychically, in other terms, in order *to create a new mentality, all that life brings forth and contributes towards it is a necessity to this aim*. For the sake of their being 'real', the immaterial qualities - preciseness, exactitude, cleanness, etc. as well as all psychical exercise - concentration, thinking, reflecting, etc. - have to be most physically realized in us as it were.

The same, indeed, holds good as to becoming a proper dancer, e.g., he, too, has to apply himself to dancing heart and mind.

The field of the progress of western civilization lies exactly in a concrete realization. If occidental culture has been more intent on the development of the material side of life than oriental culture ever was, the opposition necessary to the whole of human culture is in this contrast. So human culture is gradually on its way towards attaining the equivalence of both the immaterial and material features of man's development.

Whereas occidental culture - in developing not only the intellect, but also the sense of reality - has been cultivating the exterior aspect of life as it were, the Orient has always preconized the cult of the domination of this aspect by means of the interior strength of man. Evidently, yet the exterior aspect of life has been evolving, but is the result 'real' enough for enabling the two aspects of human nature to oppose the one the other in equivalence? Is not the exterior aspect of all existence more or less 'discarded' in this way?

In any case this beautiful theory demands a good deal of interior strength and psychical practice, the collecting of which is - within the limits of our civilization - absolutely, or anyway almost, beyond the ability of the majority of us.

In the occidental regions only a few strong minds have realized these grand psychical qualities and, thus, been able to aid and further civilization.

Though the oriental conception - dictated by the sublimest wisdom of the whole world and containing the occidental evolution in the inverse ratio - is good so far as its principle is concerned, it has not succeeded in realizing concrete life. This has been proved to us by art. Never did the art of the Orient

realize the things achieved by occidental art, to wit: the liberation from the oppression by the particular form, the creation of neutral forms and of pure relations. Conclusively: it never did bring about the equivalent expression of the two aspects of all that exists.

The great truth of the absolute and constant opposition of these two aspects, plastically expressed, remained at first hidden, after that it was merely vulgarized and limited, as if it were a poor doctrine of symbols!

The principal object of occidental culture is to render man conscious.

Originally man is not conscious of his imnost life - previously indicated here as the real life (the essential of man). Man, though, is more or less conscious of the concrete side of life, of its physical, sensual and intellectual features. *Therefore, concrete life actually is our everyman's life to-day, and so it is logical that it compels us to take care of it first of all*.

We should not forget that it is this life, indeed, which - by a reciprocal action in co-operation with our most essential being - makes us conscious of this very being and, thus, of the real life in our inmost self. And it is exactly the *progress* of our civilization, which - because of its perpetual changing-makes the concrete life, outside of ourselves, vivid to us, whilst putting us up to a real opposition and to a rule of conduct at the same time. Contrarious to this progress, the natural and primitive life does not constitute this indispensable opposition in the course of our evolution, precisely because of its remaining invariably the same to us.

Whereas concrete life is a continuous action, natural life lulls man into inactivity.

Because concrete life is ‘real’ to us, it is logical that the expression of plastic art is getting more and more ‘real’, too. At the very least, however, we ought to conceive this reality in art as a reproduction of the aspect of the reality surrounding us: we ought to see it as a reality created by man.

Thence we understand that the expression of art, whilst getting more and more abstract from the point of view of nature, is growing more and more concrete from the standpoint of art. Art will neither meddle nor make with the natural appearance any longer, no more than with the vague sentiments, on the cultivating of which man uses to be so extremely keen.

Art constructs, composes, realizes. *The expression of art follows the trend of life and not that of nature*.

Whereas man by his nature is inclined to adventurously running after fanciful conceptions, life pushes him more and more towards full concentration on a reality it creates and whch it is continuously bringing to a greater profundity.

New Art proves us that true life, real life - ‘our life’ - will not for ever be disfigured and obscured by the worries of practical life. It demonstrates that the joy of living, which it engenders, is anything but dependent on a primitive nature, and that, on the contrary, it just then unfolds its glory to the full, when

man succeeds in gaining a larger distance from this state. All means are already at hand for the realization of this true joy of living by New Life.

As the sun is by far too often clouded, we are now in possession of artificial means of all kinds to supply its rays. Nature's forces have already been adapted by man to his proper benefit. Health has been acquiring an ever greater stability thanks to the efforts of medical science. Technology is making the earth more and more fit for habitation - the whole of the progress of civilization is at our disposal: man need not but develop its results and apply them in the right way.

The primitive and 'natural' manifestation of beauty - this marvellous and direct expression of the joy of living, of true life - has been already replaced by the consequences of the culture of art. Plastic arts are by now apt to be realized in our palpable environment, e.g., in the american jazz the singing of birds has been 'humanized' in a real way.

Is it logical, then, than man goes on toiling like a machine, that he creates without the joy of living and only for the sake of his bare existence? Is it in vain that New Art has shown us that it is possible to get rid of the delimiting forms and of the natural instinct?

Let us wait for that which the exclusive concentration on utility and on practical life is going to produce. Future will afford true beauty and true life, both of them in a new form.

Whereas life and art prove to us that all evolution results from the actions both of creating *and* abolishing, all the disadvantages as well the advantages involved by the progress of civilization *are ever so many necessities as to the development of man*. But in general man does but see the one or the other of these actions. This is the ground that he looks upon life as being on the decline or as being immutable. For, creation only would be nothing less than a status without any change whatever, and abolition only would come up to ruin. But those who see these two actions at the same time for their being reciprocal, know life for being *an eternal growth*.

Nevertheless it is difficult to conceive live in a universal way as long as one is limited by some form or otherwise, either interiorly or exteriorly. In this state of mind man looks upon reality onesidedly. And, moreover, as everyone sees another side and sees it in an different way, too, everyone is relativeiy right. Things, therefore, are in that way no better than in the fable of the white and the black cow by Zola.

Yet, as in course of time human evolution has manifested itself in two ways despite of all - in other terms: both in the way of an evolution towards the integrally human status and in the way of a decay of the primitive physical status - it is possible to speak of a decline or of an evolution of life.

Indeed, both in man and in life we see the natural force opposing the human strength. Still, New Art has evidenced that the reciprocal action of this opposition produces a superior status in the end. By means of the reciprocal action of the pure relations and the pure forms the reduction of the natural aspect to a 'human' one realizes a superior state in art.

The firmer the human progress gets footing in our concrete life, the more frantic the natural instinct storms against it. For, progress means *a diminuation of the privileges of the natural status*.

Hence the hatred borne by all reactionists towards the new manifestations in art and life! And their efforts to undermine them, thus, are equally explained.

This hatred and these counter-efforts are the offspring of a narrow-minded conception: such people suffer from lack of insight. They do not perceive the amelioration progress has effected. Neither are they conscious of the fact that in spite of all deviations - which are but remnants of the primitive status of man - the true content of life does not only remain intact, but even rids itself from all noxious ballast, moreover.

Is it to be imagined that the progress of civilization does not count in the world? Is it conceivable that life should err?

Man, indeed, is liable to labour under transient mistakes, to deform even progress for some time, life, however, is representative to us, of the truth.

Yet, in the eyes of a good many people progress involves some serious sequels. Consequently, they thwart it in every possible respect and go in search of a natural life, which they do not longer recognize as a primitive form of life from that moment on, but esteem to be the 'ideal'.

As soon as the progress of occidental civilization involves any unfavourable human situations, they look upon them as if they were everlasting and would bring mankind to destruction. The fact that those situations are merely of a passing nature never does occur to them.

The saying is, e.g., that the corn is harvested more efficiently, if this is done in a primitive way and not by the means of combines. But is not it posssible that the machines in question are not yet sufficiently brought to perfection?

Is not a good deal of that which we witness being created on all sides just a trial, an experiment only? We cannot command all things at a time and still less at once understand the whole of them. If, e.g., for the time being men and animals living on corn should be less or differently fed, is it even then a certainty that this is detrimental to the progress of 'man'? Life will induce man to find that which is instrumental to his real existence.

Because it is man, by whom human life has to be realized, we ought to exert ourselves to the utmost in order that all that is necessary to 'man' may be created. In life it is the same thing as in art, with respect to which the artist, too, could never take too much trouble as to establishing the purely plastic expression.

Though actually the progress of civilization professes to be badly organized, art has disclosed to us by its harmony of forms of so different a character that even the inequality of men does not impede the constituting of a more or less harmonic organization, by which mankind will gradually attain to a more real equilibrium.

If all men were just and honest, everything would be for the best and the equilibrium could be established by virtue of itself. If all monarchs were just, a re-

public would not be preferable to a kingdom. Matters would correspond to that which is implied in the appearance of nature or of art, in both of which a spontaneous harmony is created by the means of perfect forms. Yet, in this way - exactly as it has been the case in art, with regard to which precisely because of this harmony once acquired man did not think of transforming these forms - in life man would no less remain stationary as to his status because of this *natural equilibrium*.

No less than in art we have to take reality into consideration in life. Not all human beings are just. For this reason those who are obliged to try *to cultivate that which is true and just in man, strive after the creation of situations favourable to this development, and ought to attempt the establishing of a mutual organization preventing the disequilibrium and compelling man to be just in his social relations*.

In transforming our social organization, we transform the individual. For the rest, those who try to rebel against the new order will, nevertheless, be forced to follow its course. This constraint will not have anything to do with a despotic power whatever. Even in a probably very remote future no order at all will be imposed, unless it is dictated by *mutual necessity*.

Mankind is going to see the day that the individual will be capable of governing himself. This, too, has been proved by New Art. In contradistinction to the art of the past, the particular forms of which dominated the one the other, the neutral, i.e., the universal forms of New Art do not exercise their rights the one at the cost of the other.

But it is evident that this status of mutual equivalence cannot be reached until a sufficient number of people will have acquired a mentality corresponding to this new order.

Though we are still far from this level of life, the era of crowned tyrants, however, belongs to the past. We are now living in a period of republics, of syndicates and of federations - in a period of research into *the pure relations*. The fact that so much tyranny and so many a wrong situation are yet prevailing in life is due to the lack of mutual equivalence and to the oppressive particular forms.

A general concentration upon the proper and mutual relations will solve all social difficulties.

Those among mankind who have been most rightly disgusted at the misery of man's concrete life, have never stopped taking refuge with the action of creating or of contemplating the mutual relations of the planes, the lines and the colours, which, because of their neutralizing the descriptive properties of the forms, establish beauty, independent from concrete life. This is the reason why the painting of landscape, still-life and town-views without any descriptive tenor - being in co-ordination with the particular life of man and society - are sought after, as man wants to free himself of this life and loves to rejoice in the manifestation of the pure relations.

If these representations in art are able to touch mankind to so extreme a

degree, why are they so utterly uncared for in life? Fugitive interests, though being yet useful to human evolution for a small space of time, are the cause of this neglect-fugitive interests, inherent in concrete life, which we are only too glad not to meet in art.

Full concentration upon the mutual relations of social life will alter the conception and, consequently, the efforts of man. Thus, instead of complaining of the fact that most people have no other worries in our epoch, but those of piling up money by all sorts of tricks, man will try to create economical and social circumstances that will not merely barr people from their having recourse to unjust means, but that will, moreover, impose just means and allow mankind to apply them, too. By those wrong and false situations, indeed, man is now often pushed, even driven, to his exclusive pursuing after money. Money, this precious expedient in civilization, should not be anything else, but 'a means of exchange', and, thus, it may not be allowed to take *a delimiting form*, oppressing and soiling the other forms of life.

In the sense it has been cultivated up till now, capitalism is a delimiting form abolishing itself and bound to be fully annihilated in the culture of the pure relationships. Already at present the disequilibrated social and economical situations indicate that this form has come to maturity and is on the way of being transformed. The fact that the form now in shape - instead of being 'opened' in order that an equivalence in the distribution of values may become possible - will probably settle down to another 'form' again, is clearly demonstrated by art, because art, too, transformed the particular form into a purified one to start with. Though an equilibrium of greater stability all over the world will be the result, this new form will still 'enclose' the feature money to far too great an extent as for its mundial spreading in an equivalent way getting already into the range of possibilites. As to the future, Neo-Plasticism indicates an organization of the equivalent relations for every domain of life, and by no means a new 'form'.

Another of those non-equivalent forms, being the upshot of the culture of the particular form, is all sorts of trade. Nowadays considered as one of the causes of the economical disaster, in the culture of the pure relations it will become *an equivalent means of exchange*. Moreover, in this culture *the equivalent exchange of material values for immaterial ones and vice versa* will be beneficial to an equivalent life above all.

Any work of art sets an example of this, as it is steadfast an exchange of various values of a more or less mutually equivalent character. Life, too, is but an eternal exchange. It is an exchange of material or of material for immaterial values. But actually it has degenerated into a mere lot of 'business'. Let us be decent merchants at least and no bulls and bears nor exploiters either.

Thus, as society is but an exchange, *our social equilibrium depends upon the mutual equivalence of this very exchange*.

Till now all things in life have been confounded. Consequently, the material and immaterial or spiritual values in life, too, have been mixed up. To make things worse, man uses to attach some fictitious merit or otherwise to a certain value given in exchange for an other one in order to magnify its qualities or to disguise its insufficiency.

Love and friendship are prominent figures in the mutual non-equivalent exchange. New Art has shown us that in order to attain a real equivalence oppositions ought to be pure. To be pure they first ought to be separated, i.e., detached from the environment, in which they got confounded.

When mixing up the two aspects of life, hypocrisy obtains the mastery and dominates life.

This is why it is of so great an importance that New Art has established *purified forms and pure relations. They do not dissemble nor hide either, for they are real and true, because they represent themselves for what they are without ever palming themselves off on us*. They enable us to secure a more or less equivalent exchange, an equilibrium more or less stable. But in order to constitute a real equilibrium an exchange of *strict equivalence and a mutual equality are required*. Exactly as the neutral forms of curved circumference had to be dislocated and reconstructed into a universal form in art, in life, too, the different aspects of the values have to be reduced *to a constant value*. In this way an equivalent exchange of immaterial for material values and vice versa may be effected.

Ever and anon in community life the question will be raised whether - in case of lack of physical or psychical strength - everybody will be able to give an equivalent value in exchange. In the physical domain, e.g., this will decidedly not be the case as to the old and the young, and still less as to the sick. Consequently, we are obliged to find a just solution, for, as in fact all human beings are equals to each other, all have a right to an equivalent existence. Nevertheless, we never shall succeed in reaching this point by the way of charity, nor by love or friendship either, because these qualities do not create *pure* relations. In case someone is not in a condition to do so by himself, and *as the essential value of each individual entitles him to an existence equivalent to that of the others*, he ought to be provided for *in proportion to his value*, which he is unable to realize as such: he, therefore, must be suppomed by the community. This is not only of importance to those who are incapable of exchanging equivalent values themselves, but also to the others, thence at ease as to their being able to ‘exist’ during the whole of their lives and under all circumstances that may ever occur. Then they will have sufficient strength to cultivate their own value, to live their own lives, in other terms, they will be strong enough to renounce leaning any longer on delimiting forms. Community, indeed, will but thrive by it.

Skipping patriotism - besides, the very germ of the feature following now - let us finally mention a particular form of a most inhuman character and extremely dangerous to New Life, viz., militarism. In the culture of the past man was in

need of militarism in order to maintain an *apparent* equilibrium and to defend or to reinforce the particular forms in their growing years. But as soon as New Life will have created new and neutral forms, they will have to maintain themselves by *pure mutual relations*, and from this time forward any constraint will become superfluous, even noxious.

Though our international relations are anything but balanced or pure, and the various forms - the 'fatherlands' - equally far from approaching somehow the 'neutral' status, yet the question of the possibility of disarmament is now turning up. It goes without saying that, if there were no armament, man's mutual aggression and oppression would not be possible. Be that as it may, any success as to an integral disarmament will depend upon the equivalence of the different states that intend to unify themselves. But to a still higher degree this success will depend upon the opposition offered by the old particular forms and by the personal and collective interests. Though the well-meant intention and all the endeavours of the League of Nations to this effect are proof of the culture of the pure relations having begun, there is no end to fear.

It is logical, indeed, that our epoch strives towards the perfecting, both materially and immaterially, of the particular forms, once created by the culture of the past. But let us lay stress upon the fact that, first of all, the essential object of our time is in our concentrating on the mutual relations of those various forms. It was the tenor of the culture of the past - the culture of the particular form that is-to create this form and to concentrate upon it without taking too keen an interest in its mutual relations. But the erroneous part of this conception was hidden in the opinion that it would be possible to come to an equilibrated life merely by the perfectioning of the form. This fact, disclosed to us by life, was equally demonstrated by the art of the past. Permanently all concentration had been focussed in the particular form, and by means of the perfection of this form man was sure to create *the* masterpiece. Still, the artist had already got aware of the value of the relations and in spite of all - as it has been pointed out here before-the expression of the relations unconsciously evolved in art as it did in life.

In this way the exclusive concentration on the particular form - which does expose us to the danger of our sticking in the individual domain - has had no other effect *in art*, but that of 'opening' the form in order that it may be united with the whole of the work, and *in life* with the whole of the world.

In order to get conscious of the necessity of another social organization, we can hardly ever follow assiduously enough that which the culture of art has shown us. Let us repeat in this connection that the essential content of art consists in *the annihilation of the individual oppression by the form*, as well as in *the creation of a rhythm of universal expression*.

Let us repeat that New Art, thus, does not disclose itself as an art of the past cloaked in a new disguise. Exactly the reverse is the case, for by such disguise the art of the past has succeeded in prolonging its existence from century to

century, even up to our new epoch. Both in art and in life it is only too poorly conceived that the new era contains a new culture and that the culture of the particular form is expiring. Though the new mentality has not yet become the essence, but to a very few human beings, the culture of the pure relations is revealing itself in order to attain its end: *the creation of the equivalent relations*.

In life the reorganization therefore, ought not to be limited to the particular forms themselves, nor to each of them separately either. On the contrary, it will have to be extended all over *universal* life.

In politics it is not sufficient to aspire to equivalent relations as to the interior, for, the realization of equivalent relations of an international standard, above all, ought to be brought about.

In art it has been for Neo-Plasticism to demonstrate this necessity in the exactest way. By intersecting lines the mutual relations annihilate each separate plane, in order that they unite completely among themselves.

The rectangular planes of different dimensions and different colours demonstrate to satisfaction that *internationalism* involves no chaos at all, in which monotony is going to be the dominant feature, but that it will lead us up to a unity that is well-ordered and sharply divided. There are even very pronounced limits in Neo-Plasticism. But these limits are not *really* closed: the straight lines in their rectangular opposition intersect constantly, in order that their rhythm may continue in the whole of the work. Equally in the future international order the various countries because of their being mutually equivalent, then, will own their proper and different values. There will be just frontiers, exactly in proportion to the value of each country in relation to the general federation. These frontiers will be clearly limited, but not ‘closed’: no customs, no passports. Foreigners will not any longer be looked down on as on people deprived of their civic rights.

Notwithstanding all its divergences with respect to the dimensional proportions, Neo-Plasticism is based on the rectangular relation - which is constant and *one of the lines of which is parallel to the horizon as to its position*. This implies that everywhere in future order there will be - in spite of all diverging as to quantity - constancy of quality, which is the base of complete unity.

Though Neo-Plasticism expresses the end of human culture as an accomplished fact, this end indicates us at the same time the next way we are going to take. And though the mutual equality, which has been manifested by Neo-Plasticism, cannot be realized in the life now prevailing, yet New Art has shown us that even in our days it is possible to constitute pure forms as well as pure relations and establish *a new organization* by means of them, allowing a life of greater liberty already in our time, a life, which, as a consequence, will be at any rate more unified indeed.

In conformance with the annihilation of the particular form in art, we see a good deal of the delimiting conceptions of the past being already done away with in life, too.

After its having become disfigured to a delimiting form in the course of human culture, religion - in its form as a church - has been seen to liberate itself more and more from its ballast and to show its true content. As art has demonstrated to the full that the mutual separation of the forms enhances their intrinsic value and brings forth a more perfect union, we may look back on the disestablishment and on the separating of religion from erudition or philosophy with equal satisfaction.

Once being delivered and rendered to itself, everything will be more easily fathomed.

All those old, delimiting forms, as the family, the native country, etc., which have been cultivated and protected by the state and the church for so long a time - and which are still necessary - have been recognized by the new mentality in their conventional sense for being mere obstacles to a real human life. Such as they are like nowadays, they do oppose the constitution of the pure social relations and of the individual freedom as well.

It is obviously difficult to the new mentality to quit the particular forms, by which it was engendered. But the moment it knows them for their being its oppressors, their abolition is no longer a sacrifice. Besides, life drives us forward and our free arbiter is not always considered.

Exactly as art itself has gradually created a new plastic expression of an ever more real equilibrium, life itself, too, will gradually establish the same equilibrium within a new social and economical organization.

The way life is going to take will not merely depend upon the efforts of the new mentality, but equally upon the character of the resistance offered by the mind of the past. But in its course life is constrained by necessity, and its new exigencies push it more and more in the direction of the equilibrium. It is necessity only that creates progress and the latter carries mankind along. In case the progress in science, in technics, etc., is too much ahead for man in general to keep pace with, he applies it in the wrong way and mankind often falls a victim to this process. This is the reason why both experience and education are utterly imperative.

The fact that man is more and more compelled to concentrate upon his own self in order to maintain himself, and that life is getting more and more hard to boot, is liable to make us lose all faith in civilization. But, if we see this fact as something imposed by necessity and caused by the culmination of the dying particular form, consequently, as a temporary constraint outside of ourselves, it is clear that liberation is drawing near.

Though his immediate individual and collective existence ranks above all other things to man, nothing would be more childish than insisting upon the impossible. Exactly because of his obstinately pushing his way towards its realization, man misses the mark. In order to create a truly human existence, we stand in need of courage, of exertion, of patience. Is this time lost then? Let us not

forget that the essential thing to man is the cultivation of his true human being: temporary existence will hasten to his assistance and support him. By cultivating his truly human being due strength will come forth and bring along a temporary existence conformable to this very being.

Would we muster up strength enough for not only submitting to, but even - if necessary -for occasioning the destruction of our *apparent* existence of our own choice, for sacrificing the interests and situations gratifying it, in order to create a truly human existence both for ourselves and for the others?

In destroying the particular form, thus, in sacrificing the beauty of this form to the purely plastic expression, art has already done so.

Even when cultivating his true being - in other terms: the real life - man raust needs be egoistic. This fact was disguised by the past. New mentality, however, acknowledges it. It considers egoism to be justified and necessary to the creation of both our proper life and that of the others.

Yet the conventional ethics are not the pure expression of the sublime universal morality. Exactly as in the works of all figurative art the purely plastic expression has not only been confused, but disfigured as well, the same in life, these morals have been troubled and deformed by their own limitations within the different forms.

And exactly as the culture of the particular form and that of the relations has been mixed up until now, two opposite actions have been intermingled in the conventional ethics: that of the concentrating on the particular forms and that of the uniting of these forms with the whole. Thus, both the egoistic and the altruistic actions are equally imposed, but they do keep up appearances of altruism only. Made by the church and the state and aiming at the elevation of humanity above its own limitations, in fact, these morals yet did impose the latter. It has been overlooked that evolution is eternal - to put it this way - and that it is not limited so some period or otherwise.

That which the sublime universal morality - being an expression of human evolution -imposes *is the same as that which life decrees* - equally an expression of this evolution. But the conventional ethics have forthwith dictated such qualities as are only to be acquired in future. This has been the rank error of the greater number of spiritual movements, besides, though springing forth from the very loftiest principles.

Owing to the limited conception of man, who by his nature is bound to oppose it, the sublime universal morality has failed in its purpose. This is quite logical, for *this* morality has never been the essential expression of the culture of the past, characterized as that of the particular form. As, therefore, the sublime universal morality has not been and could not be realized, the institutions in question did not abstain from imposing it under the form of some conventional morals. This is the source of all the hypocritical and crooked situations, of which life is the scene up to now. But, as everything is necessary - even those efforts, which cannot be realized - and because all things attain to human evolution, there is nothing whatever to be criticized.

The sublime universal morality will meet its full expression at the highest pitch of perfection of the culture of the equivalent relations. In its end art has demonstrated that only the line and the colour, after their having been delivered from all oppression by the form, are apt to constitute the equivalent relations. Equally in life only the free individual and its collective bodies are able to form a mutually equivalent organization and, thus, capable of realizing the content of the sublime universal morality, which orders us to live for the whole and for all.

But art equally discloses to us that before this end - consequently, pending the culture of the pure relations - the sublime universal morality, nevertheless, will be able to express itself in a more real way in life than it ever could do in the past. For, exactly as the neutral forms, once delivered from their particularities, were able to do so in art, the individuals, when freed from their noxious egoism, will be capable of establishing just relations, and, thus, will live the one for the other.

As the culture of the pure relations has already been heralded, the sublime universal morality is nearing its realization. This is the beautiful content of New Life, the advent of which we do already perceive.

In the beginning of the culture of the pure relationships the sublime universal morality will not yet be able to express itself in a complete way. For, because of the oppression being still too generally exercised by the particular forms, its task, first of all, will be *in the annihilation of this oppression in order to constitute these pure relations*. Whereas till now the old ethics have preconized the cult of the particular form, from that moment onward they will start preconizing *the abolition of this form* for the sake of its real content being, thus, enabled to setting itself free and becoming apt to constituting pure relations. Therefore, in the new era their action will be *to preconize and to reinforce the culture of the pure relations*. It is in this way that in the end they will attain the realization of the tenor of the sublime universal morality, which is the true content of love, of friendship, of fraternity and of all their noble synonyms.

As the culture of the particular form did not only create and cultivate the latter, but destroyed it, too, morality ought to be in keeping with this double action. With the same readiness, therefore, *it will have to make acceptable the evil as the good*.

But the confused and disfigured ethics of the past did not accept the evil, as they gave out that is was something abnormal, an illness, a defect of life.

Notwithstanding the fact that so far as we ourselves are concerned, we are restricted in the acceptance of the evil within the limits of our own physical endurance and sensibility, the distinguishing of the morality in its two opposi tions is of the greatest support to us in our not exacting from the others anything that is not possible. In other terms: this destinction helps us not to claim the good, when the evil has its moment of predominance. And, moreover, it makes us understand that the good and the evil annihilate each other, exactly because of their being oppositions.

Art has shown us that in the beginning of the culture of the particular form the actions of creation and cultivation prevailed, whereas towards the end of it the action of abolition is apparently getting all the importance. As the same applies to life, the two oppositions of morality, too, ought to have the stress in the same sense. Whereas in the beginning of human culture especially the good will prevail, on the other side the evil must be accepted towards the end of it. Towards the end of the culture of the particular form the sublime universal morality - virtually containing but the good - seems as if to dictate that those forms should be harmed. But in fact it only envisages the constitution of the pure and equivalent relations and, therefore, requires purified forms. Though the delimiting particular forms are bound to abolish themselves, it is by the constitution of these relations that this abolition is going to be realized - to such a degree as will be possible.

New morality, thus, imposes *the acceptance of the abolition of the oppressive particular forms*. In this sense it is *the morality of the evil* for some space of time. But it opposes the mutual abolition of the particular forms in the sense of a total destruction, as it itself is in want of *the essence of these forms* for its new creation.

Thus, New Morality prescribes that man acknowledges the fact that the evil is at the bottom but the good. For, the sublime universal morality is above the limitations of time.

Towards the close of the culture of the particular form the morality of the evil - though always existing - will overrule that of the good. Because the particular form is in a state of dissolution at the end of its culture, evidently, the evil cannot but prevail. For, our concrete reality does not allow of both creation and abolition at the same moment. Exactly as the sublime universal morality does not reckon with time, this double action does not either. As in this period the evil will dominate, this fact accounts for the terrible time and the distressing conditions we are in just now. Yet the other of the two oppositions of human culture - that of creation - is simultaneously active. The opposition of the morality corresponding to this creative action, therefore, imposes the act of creation at the same time. This is the reason why it seems as if this action were in wait for the result of the abolition of the oppressive particular form, a result culminating in a new form, which is apt to realize the new action, centering in the *constitution of the mutually just relations*.

In proportion to the abolishing of the delimiting particular forms, the creative action of the new culture will be realized, being reinforced by a *new morality of the good*. For, then the true morality will be able to bring about its own realization, because the mutually equivalent relations are only by themselves capable of realizing the good for all of us. Gradually it now becomes the morality of the good, but in a sense absolutely different from that of the past. *Whereas till now the good for all of us was but imaginary, it will become real in the new culture*.

Though we are at present in both an individual and collective obscurity, we

still may rejoice at a beautiful perspective for mankind and at a lofty task for ourselves. By contributing to the abolition of the obstructive particular forms and in constituting mutually pure relations we are able to attain to their future equivalence and, consequently, to the future happiness of all of us. By conforming themselves to progressive life, the temporary ethics are nearing towards the status of being the expression of their true content: the sublime universal morality.

It is a most beautiful feature of our epoch that the two oppositions of this morality have been thrown light upon and that, thus, we are capable of discerning two structures of morality as being the two expressions of two cultures. For, in this way we are enabled to understand and to apply the sublime universal morality.

Because of the necessity of cultivating himself, man is egoistic by nature and even obliged to be so. It is logical, thus, that the conventional ethics failed in opposing this human trait. In fact, they did cultivate - when not the sacrificing of the temporary or the real existence - at any rate hypocrisy.

The past could only entail the sort of egoism that is detrimental to the others. This kind of selfishness resulted from the development of the particular form, which is by its nature in an unbalanced relation to the other forms of the same order.

And still at present, as the culture of the particular form has not yet been terminated for all of us and the mutual relations have no more been balanced either, even the justified egoism is bound to harm the others.

Unless some degree of equality of our minds will have been reached, the justified egoism cannot be - directly nor actually either - in the interest of the others. In Neo-Plasticism, which expresses this equality, we see the highest amount of strength and value meted out to each colour and non-colour, and precisely in this way the other colours and non-colours attain their proper strength and value, so that the whole of the composition benefits by the care given to each plane separately. Though this holds good as to morpho-plasticism as well, yet - exactly because of its lack of mutual equality - here the care spent on one form is often to the detriment of the other forms.

In the past man was relatively right in being egoistic to the damage of the others. Rightly he cultivated ‘his own self’ and, inevitably, he often harmed his fellowmen. As a defence for the good of the others the old ethics, therefore, were apparently superfluous. But, in fact, they were necessary as all is necessary that is engendered by life. They were an indispensable counterweight in order to be thrown into the scale at any time, when it proved to be useful to the real life of man. Let us not forget that it is this real life, which evolution is developing above all - both by the good and by the evil.

If pending the culture of the particular form we understand by the object of the ethics then prevailing the creating, the maintaining and the cultivating of this

particular form, they did not fail, but were the just expression of that culture.

But if, on the other hand, we should imagine that their real tenor was in the edification of the others, we are mistaken. And even at present, as the culture of the particular form has not yet come to its terminus, in case the ethics will malce us believe that we live for the good of the others, they are a falsehood. Virtually we do live to the benefit of ourselves and exactly *by our proper edification* we live in the interest of the others.

Because of the necessity of securing his personal existence, man, selfish by nature, will always, even during the whole of his evolution, remain egoistic. But in the course of this evolution the egoism to the detriment of the others will be transformed into an egoism to the immediate profit of all of us.

Of course, the ethics, they too, will be transformed in the process of human evolution. More and more the true sense of morality is opposing the conventional ethics and this so in absolute conformity with human progress. The more the moment of the maturity of the particular form will be approaching, the more this form will be destroyed and the lesser, thus, suffering will be avoidable. By acknowledging this fact to-day's hard life is not only becoming acceptable to us, but it even procures us the certitude of a new life drawing near, notwithstanding all the difficulties life exposes us to.

In a society of people of unequal mentality everything is, forcibly, non-equivalent. In this case the individual qualities or values bear a distorded relation to each other, the factors of which are hostile or represent disproportional contrarities. Here is *the* realm of injustice, for the values available are contrarious and non-reciprocal. So hatred is returned for love.

As long as hatred is ruling supremely no true love is feasible. This is the reason why there is a general lack of true love, fraternity, friendship. It is, therefore, logical that in a society of this stamp all those beautiful things could not but inevitably annihilate themselves.

In its abolishing the natural aspect of the form art has demonstrated that life will produce that which man tries in vain or refuses to do in life. When abolishing seeming love, life is on its way to realize love's true content in an exact way.

From the point of view of New Morality - which orders justice - none of our human qualities is fit to survive, unless they are reciprocal. Considering the inequality of humanity, New Morality, therefore, cannot impose these qualities unless this mutual equality will be acquired to some extent. As for the time being, it can only induce us to the constitution of pure relations and to an education to the purpose in order to further this equality, from which the realization of all the qualities mentioned previously will logically result. The actual state of mind is not susceptible of realizing them, but it is capable *of observing the logic of justice*.

For all things because of the harshness of to-day's life, there is scarcely

anybody left that bears well-feeling towards his fellowmen. Would it be the right thing to try to revive this affection, whilst the intellect and the circumstances are plainly discarding it? Would it do to rebel against the progress of civilization by our opposing the consequences it is leading up to? Let us leave to life the task of affording a greater profundity to the intellect and of transforming the social conditions, so that man may draw nearer to a true disposition, in order that the 'heart' might be won back. In any case let us incessantly try to be homogenous to life evolving.

Every day anew we cannot be but startled at the total lack of true love, fraternity or friendship or goodness. Centuries have passed since the lofty message of the universal love was imposed. Without denying its influence, it is a fact that man has not changed.

Let us, therefore, not insist upon that which has proved unfit for realization. Art has demonstrated that *life is pushing mankind towards the status of equivalence of his two aspects and, thus, towards the annihilation of the individual lmitations*. It is in this way that life will arrive at the realization of the grand ideals, once imposed.

Although in the midst of the delimiting forms of all kinds, now dying and decomposing, very little of the new era is obvious to be noticed, it still becomes perceptible by an action that does not yet attain its full realization - exclusively because of the momentary oppression of these forms.

As soon as New Life will be advancing, it is evident that a new morality will be founded. It is clear that it will be rooted in the new culture, which has been revealed both by life and by art. During the culture of the pure relations it will be based on the status of culmination of this culture, i.e., on *the mutual equivalent relations*, to which New Life is gradually attaining.

The New Morality is that of the social life, contrarious to the ethics of the past, which tended towards this aim, but actually did not protect anything, but the particular life, either individual or collective. Whereas the ethics of the past were supported by the church and the state, the New Morality will be sustained by human society itself. In abstracto its object is *international, universal justice*. for, whereas in spite of their essential content the old ethics actually supported the different particular forms - even the one at the cost of the other - the New Morality is apt to realize the equivalent relation of the civiuzed world.

That a New Life is springing forth is confirmed by the fact that the actual life offers this opposition-often in a most dreadful way - against the old culture and its ethics. Because man is still harbouring his brutal and 'natural' status, excesses and even felonies are witnessed. Far from defending them, let us insist upon the constitution of the pure relations and the purified forms, by which all those remainders of the primitive human status wil be restricted to a minimum, so that New Life is able to develop without terrible shocks. But, too, on

account of the exigencies of the actual life and the quite different situations it brings about, the ethics of the past are going to be more and more annihilated. In our actual life all moral qualities as goodnes, disinterested love, friendship, charity, etc, are less and less put into practice because of the Virtual impossibility of doing so. For, being under an ever heavier strain as to the material order of things, the individual has no strength to lose. The fact that in consequence of the inequality of men the one is profiting by the loss of the other is no longer to be defended.

In case in our eyes the phenomenon that man is more and more compelled to maintain himself and to defend his life should seem to be contradictory to evolution or telling against the progress of civilization, we ought not to overlook that we have reached the end of the culture of the particular form and that we, therefore, have to suffer from the effects of the dissolution of the forms of the past. Formerly supported by these forms -which were themselves an object of caring and worrying at the time - they are no longer capable of doing so at present, which is the reason why the individual himself is equally in peril now. But in this way man is regaining 'himself', and it will entirely depend upon his own strength whether one day or the other he will succeed in attaining his own liberty by the constitution of free forms. With respect to this the most urgent necessity has been imposed: man must create.

Although New Morality and reason are able to guide us and art capable of going ahead, we have to insist on the fact that the 'realization' itself is the first thing of all and that New Life is created by those very qualities, which are apparently but simple and insignificant factors, though virtually being of the utmost importance. Let us mention, e.g., the value of the exactitude and of the neatness of execution as they are shown to us by New Art, proving, thus, the possibility of their being extant in life.

Notwithstanding the fact the exactitude and the neatness of execution always realize the work in all art, in New Art these qualities do not only reach their pitch of perfection, but, moreover, here they are conceived in quite a different way as they were in the past. In spite of all precision everything was confounded in past art. In New Art, however, everything shows itself in a clear way: neutral forms, planes, lines, colours, relations. It has been by its exactitude and its neatness of execution that New Art has established in a real way the mutal equivalence of the composition: the equilibrium.

As to life this fact shows us the great truth: that the new forms and the mutual relations have no real value, but for their being realized in an exact and precise way.

Exactitude is one of the most urgently needed instruments as to the realization of New Life. In a good deal of the manifestations of our actual life we see already precision and exactitude being more and more sought after, imposed as they are by necessity. In this connection let us but mention the circulation of traffic in our metropoles. The Place de l'Opéra in Paris gives us a better demonstration of what New Life is like, than many a theory dealing with it. The

rhythm of the oppositions of the two directions, twice repeated, realizes a vivid equilibrium by its exactness of execution. We cannot but stress the fact that in life the moral qualities are not sufficient, the realizing of them is the thing that counts.

The entire progress of civilization (actual life) unconsciously goes - though plenty of times via the wrong track - in the direction of New Life. But, for his still lingering within the bounds of the spirit of the past and because of his ever concentrating on the various forms, man has omitted to account for the fact that he, inevitably, was going to create unjust relations by doing so. An unbalanced status has been the result. But just as well we are able to state - and most gladly we do - that even in the range of politics there is a sincerely meant cropping up of concentration on the mutual relations. This effort is apt to annihilate the noxious delimiting forms and their misshapen consequences.

After their having been supported by tradition, the state and the church up till now, the familial, social and religious conditions - primitive forms as they are - are gradually seen to come to perfection and to change their aspect for the greater part. To say the contrary and to believe - as often is the case - that the new conditions of to-day are nothing but the degenerated forms of the past, comes up to subverting the course of progress. It comes up to not conceiving the content of life, which has, nevertheless, disclosed itself both in art and in concrete life as *the liberation of that which is particular and as the unification of that which is universal*.

Yet, having freed itself from the oppression by the particular form and, thus, being enabled to tend towards the realization of the equivalent relations, New Mentality actually is the state of mind of a small minority only. As it has been mentioned previously, it is, however, sustained by the unconscious action of a rather great collectivity. Together we march towards the foundation of the pure relations, leading the way to the realization of the *equivalent* relations. And even all of us accomplish the abolishing of the delimiting forms, the progress of mankind.

All are running counter to the culture of the past, the culture of the particular form, and all are living already within the culture of the new era, the culture of the pure relations.

This truth, which art has shown us plastically, in a visible way that is, is of the highest importance in order to have us ever so little understand the complicated march of the progress of civilization. It helps us to accept, too, both the evil and the good in life, and, first of all, not to lose ourselves in a pessimistic criticism as to life, which causes us to suffer so much.

Let us state, however, that art, though be it in an abstract domain - has not limited itself to an ‘idea’, but that it has always been a ‘realized’ expression of the equilibrium.

Notwithstanding that the ideas are the origin of that which is living in us, and

apart from the fact that the humanitarian principles represent an enormous power, *the realization of a happy life* is the capital thing.

Whereas in the beginning of all culture the ideas are strong, towards the end of it they do not only get threadbare, but in this period their realization is demanded thereat. At the debut of the culture of art its equilibrium was still more or less veiled by individual conceptions. Towards the end of its culture art has established this equilibrium - in all its relativity - in a *real* way. Why, then, in view of this possibility should we despair in life?

A good deal of that which is concerning the new organization, shown to us by art, seems to be on the verge of being realized in Russia in a more direct way than it has been done in other countries. But every country has its own particularities and its proper exigencies. Consequently, that which is desirable for one country, is not irrefutably so for the other ones at all events.

Yet, the great line of evolution is a general one and quite the same for any country. In general terms we may say that in case the new organization of one country is too much ahead for the individual to live up to it, or if the inequality of the individuals should oppose it for some time, life will provide for the right solution, it will indicate us the way to be taken.

When thoroughly observing that which is going on, we detect that in *all* civilized countries analogous phenomena do occur. But, as a rule, evolution is slow in advancing over here and its manifestations, being cloaked in the traditional forms, are more complicated than they are in Russia. Is, therefore, this evolution less advanced? Life will show:

Life is truth

Paris, December 1931

piet mondriaan
the true value of the oppositions

Everybody is acquainted with the two principal oppositions of life: the good and the evil. Everybody suffers from the one or is happy because of the other. But, by no means does everybody account for the true value of these oppositions, and, generally speaking, not even the striking necessity of it is perceived by everyone: the good is claimed, whereas the evil is evaded as much as possible.

By intuition man is longing for the good. He pines for unity, for equilibrium - in the first place for himself. That is why he falls back upon the pursuing of a status of mock welfare and of a mere static balance, which, forcibly, opposes the equilibrium of life. Man, therefore, pleases himself with a false unity, and, whilst groping for this, he, evidently, rejects all dualism of the oppositions, which is but apparent in fact, though of a rather palpable reality to us.

It is obvious that man in general, though being aware of the profound unity of life, but living in this disequilibrated universe has not simultaneously accepted the dualism of the oppositions till now: that he, thus, has not lived a complete life, in which this dualism would be dissolved. In order to realize *this* life we

are in need of a more perfect reality, and equally of a more advanced development: of a longer period of culture. This is the reason why man contents himself with an apparent unity, why he is continuously limiting himself within all sorts of particular forms. Living within non-equivalent oppositions and being he himself a complex of those oppositions, man does not posses the certitude of the possibility of a true equilibrium in life. It is quite natural that he is only hunting for 'the best' of the oppositions life tenders him, meanwhile considering the opposition he gropes for as the unity he is aware of. Yet, life demonstrates to us that its beauty is in the fact that precisely the inevitable disequilibrated oppositions push us towards the searching after equivalent oppositions, which simply and solely bring forth the true unity. So far this true unity has only been realized - in all relativity - in art and in thinking. That is how matters stand in the real existence. But also in the domain of morality the oppositions of the ideas and conceptions make us draw nearer to truth: to the unification, the annihilation of the oppositions.

By his creating of apparent unities man wants to rush things. But because of his dwelling upon them, they arrest him, and, consequently, he is advancing too slowly. Thus, the purification and the mutual separation of the seeming unities - the particular forms - are urgently and primarily required. It is by this way that the oppositions appear for what they really are: pure relations, that is. When once the equivalence of these oppositions will have been found, the rhythm will disengage, the way will be free and open to life.

If we should imagine that we could already live in a true unity at present and fail to see the disequilibrium existing, we shall be disillusioned. Life teaches us that we have to 'create' this unity and that this cannot be done, but by separating, dislocating and reconstructing the apparent unities, which exist or easily crop up everywhere. As we are within the reality, we must reckon with it, but in order to be able to do so, it is necessary for us to perceive it in the right way and to recognize that it is not a complete and closed form, but a perpetual movement of ever changing oppositions.

Life, history, science and art teach us that only by discerning and experiencing the oppositions we gradually come to attain *the* unity, *the* complete life. They prove us that life is nothing but a continuously acquiring of more profundity as to one and the same thing.

It is worth our fullest approving that man of our days does not longer believe, but prefers to observe. In the midst of the chaos and the overflow of life it is, therefore, of the utmost importance that we find indicated - in the free domain of art - the right way to arrive at an equivalence of the oppositions, which creates - in all relativity - complete life, equilibrium, happiness. Art justifies plastically that which is difficult to express in words.

In a degree, though, the oppositions have been perceived in life so far as they are particular forms, but it has been neglected to conceive them as being 'relations'. Yet, exactly the proper and mutual relations of the elements do determine the whole.

Art never has neglected to make researches into these relations nor omitted

either to break the statical aspect, which reality forces upon us. In plastic art the artist has distinguished and attentively studied the oppositions of reality. He has aimed at the composing of lines, planes and colours in their just and equivalent relations in order to create a dynamical equilbrium annhilating the statical balance of things. Through this it is that the work of art touches and moves us by its 'harmony' (the unification of the good and the evil); that we recognize suffering and joy in it - that the work of art is complete.

Whether established or not - in plastic art the principal oppositions are expressed by means of the rectangular relation, which is absolute. But this relation acquires a relative and vivid expression by the secondary relations: other relations of position, of dimension and of values, all of them ever varying. The work never does convey anything so much as a repetition of the plastic means, but it always bears testimony of their constant opposition.

Although these relations have always been established intuitively, the artist - who by his nature is only aspiring at expressing the beauty of the particular forms-has become more and more *conscious* of that which he had been doing. So it is that in the course of centuries a culture of the relations has been brougbt forth, which has not but fully been unfolding in our epoch. In the past this culture opposed the culture of the particular form, and it has been exactly by the reciprocal action of these two cultures that nowadays we have been enabled to consider the latter as drawing near an end; the research into the relations having annihilated the particular form, after its having been more and more separated and dislocated. After this the neutral form, the pure line and the pure colour have become the sole means to express the relations. The culture of the 'pure' relations has begun.

Thus, it is by the 'culture' of the particular form and not by the neglecting of it that art has progressed towards the culture of the pure relations - in New Art. For centuries on end the form did not lose its natural aspect, till modern times (since impressionism) have first modified, then annihilated it.

Let us rejoice at our living in the epoch of art's obtaining freedom from the domination of the particular forms. These forms, indeed, impede our full enjoying the complete unity, which cannot be established in a clear way but by the neutral form, the pure line and the pure colour, premising these means to be entirely absorbed in the composition.

The study of the culture of art gives us full security about our nearing a life that is no longer dominated by any particular forms or disequilibrated relations (oppositions) whatever: we are approaching a life of pure forms and pure relations - a 'human' life.

If anyone should advance that art has always given proof of 'harmony', we may perceive in New Art that it was not but by virtue of the genius (the intuition) that the art of the past expressed a veiled harmony in spite of all. Though the work of the past bore a balanced expression, yet always there was something dominating in the range of the forms and in that of the relations. Suffice it to mention the predominance of the figures or things as to paintings, or the predominant expression of the height in Gothic art, etc., etc.

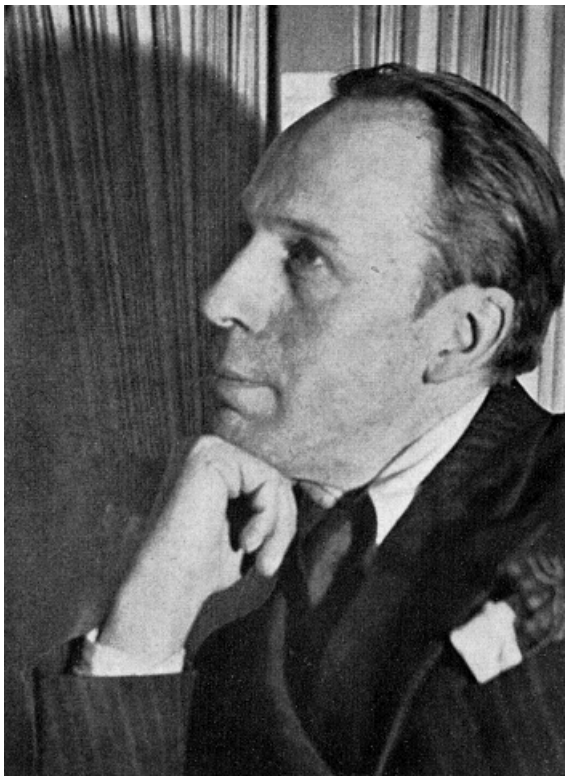
From antiquity onward up to our days art has shown us that we march towards, an ‘open’ life, a clear, free life, even whilst we are still living in a life of the past, in which everything is confused, in which one part dominates the other, in which all things intermingle: the good and the evil, kindness and malice, love and hatred - in which all is an *apparent* unity.

Nevertheless, the point could be raised that the artist creates the work of art, but that life composes life and that we ourselves are only ‘thrown’ into the world. But, first of all, let us not forget that the artist himself is also ‘pushed’ by life in his work, and, secondly, that all of us are part of life, of this very life, which does not count with time and space and which is - exactly as in art - ever the same at the core. It only needs developing within ourselves. Even in spite of us, we participate in the grand and perfect composition of life, which - if only we are keen in observing it - establishes itself according to the development of art. Yet, let us always be aware of the fact that the present is the unification both of the past and the future!

December, 1934

plates

*1



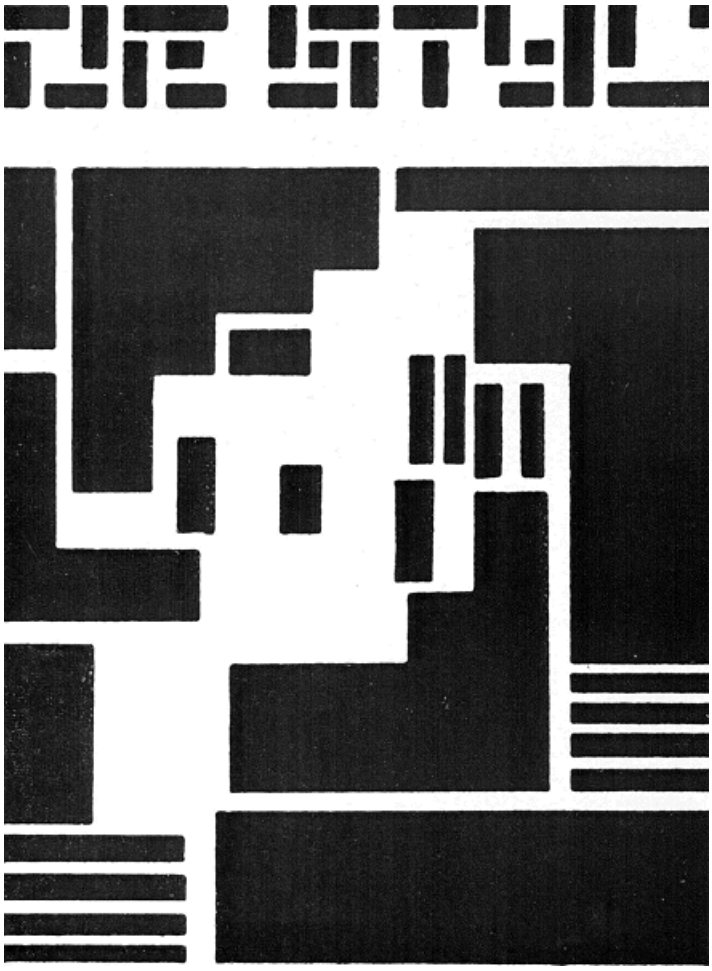
1 Theo van Doesburg

2 Piet Mondriaan

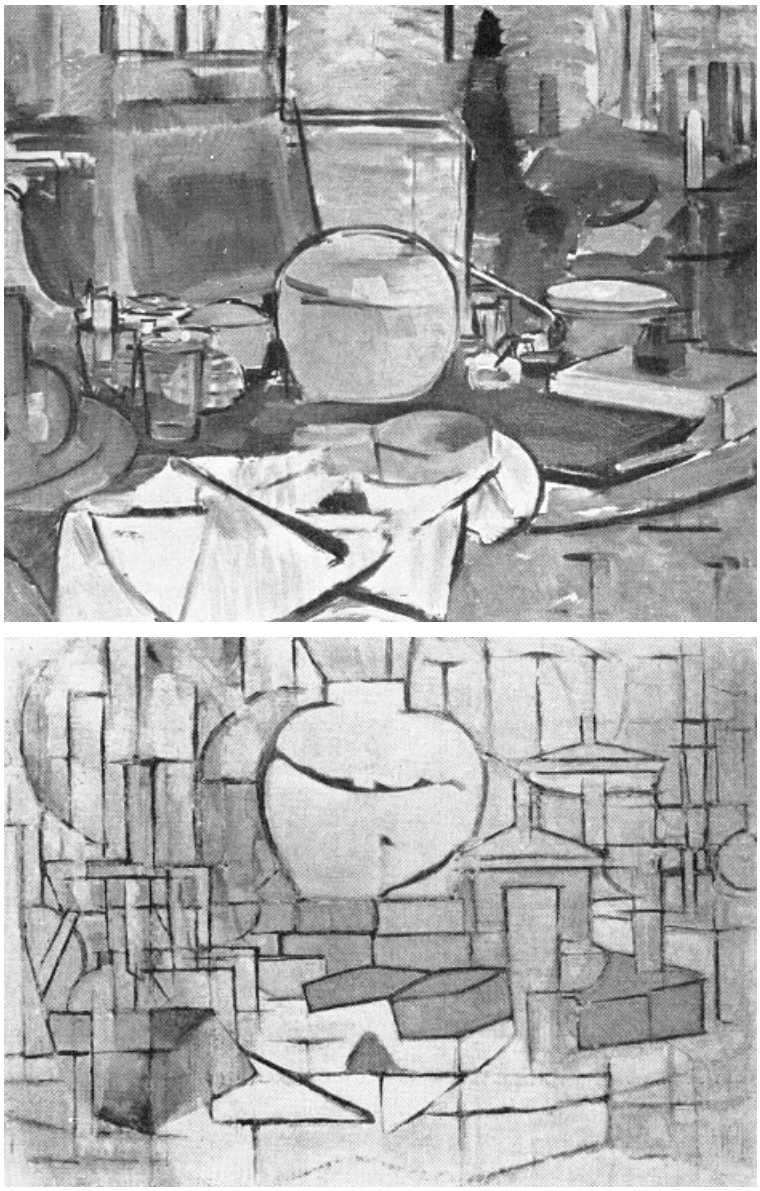
3 Bart van der Leck

4 J.J.P. Oud

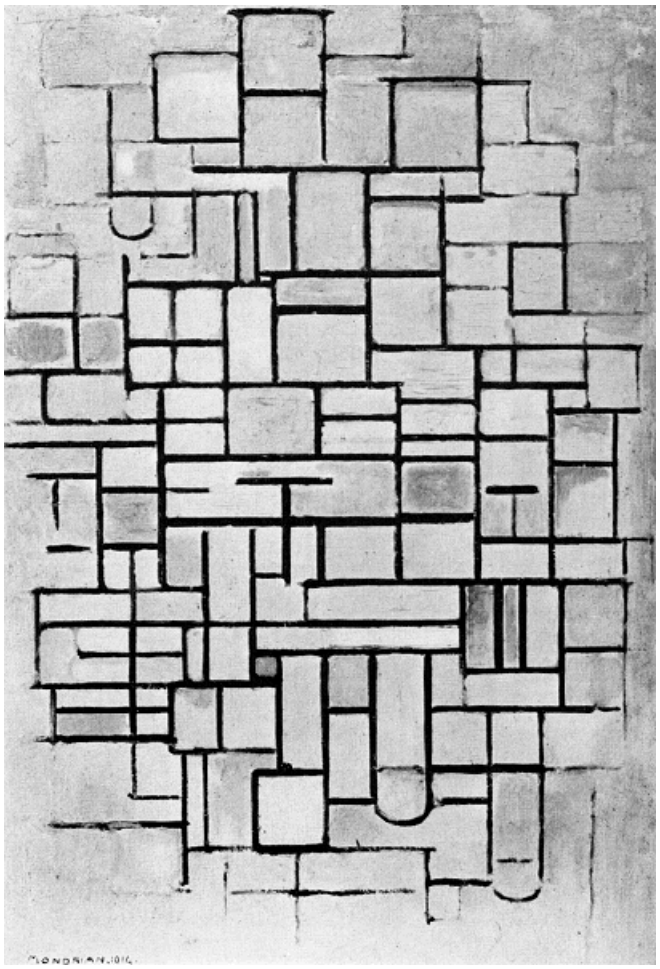
5 G. Rietveld



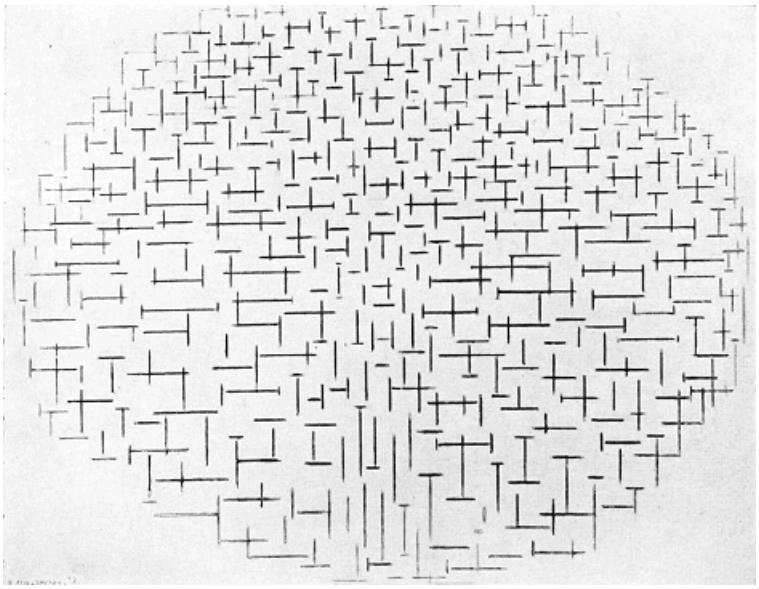
6 Huszar: cover design for De Stijl



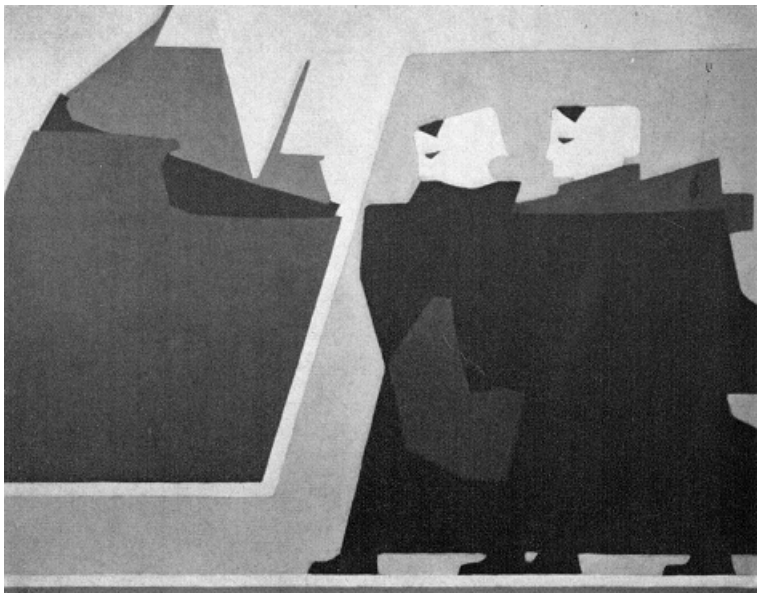
7 Mondriaan: Still life with ginger jar (two versions) 1910



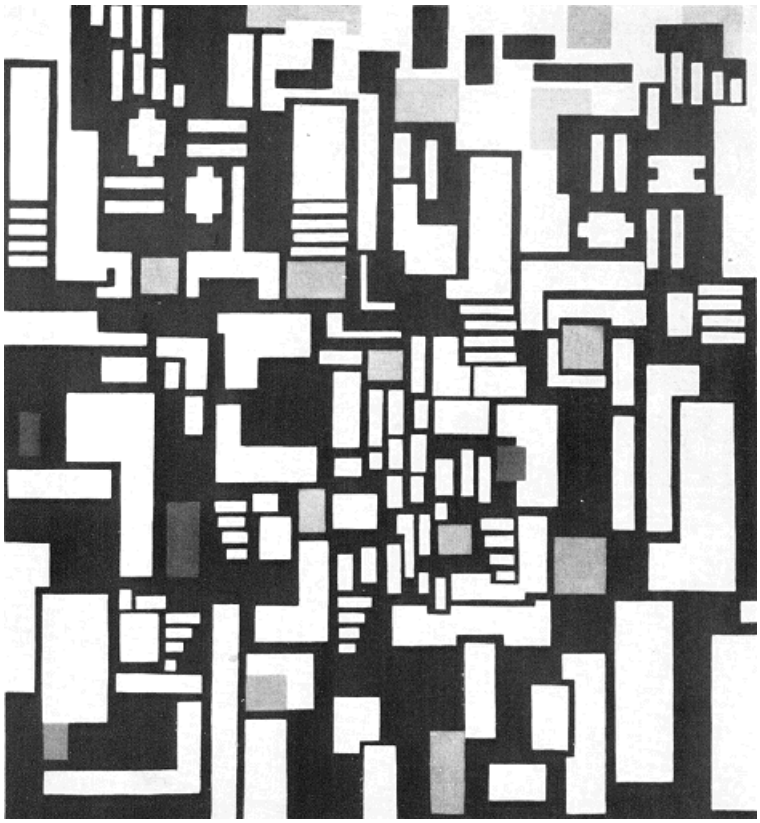
8 Mondriaan 1914



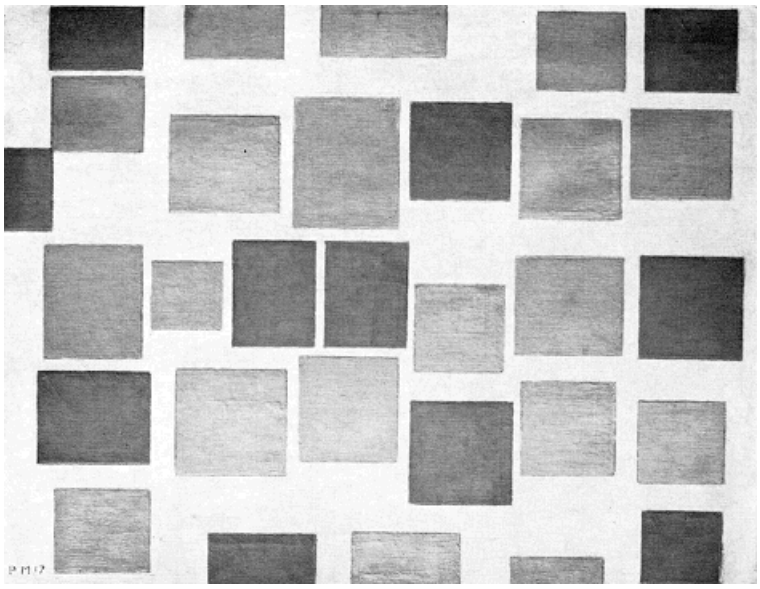
9 Mondriaan 1917



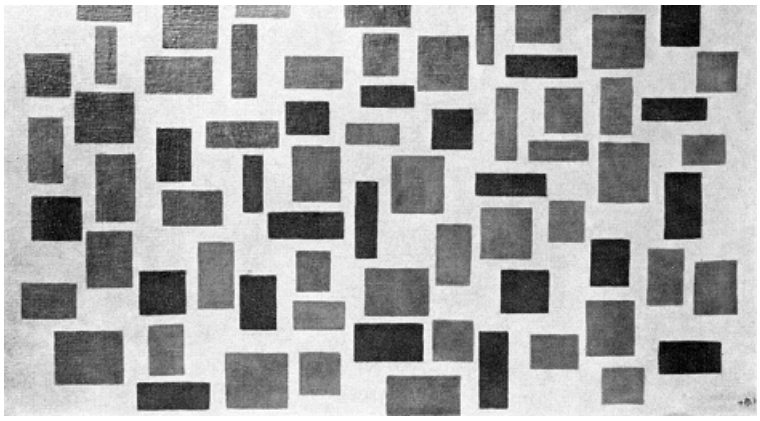
10 Van der Leck: The tempest 1916



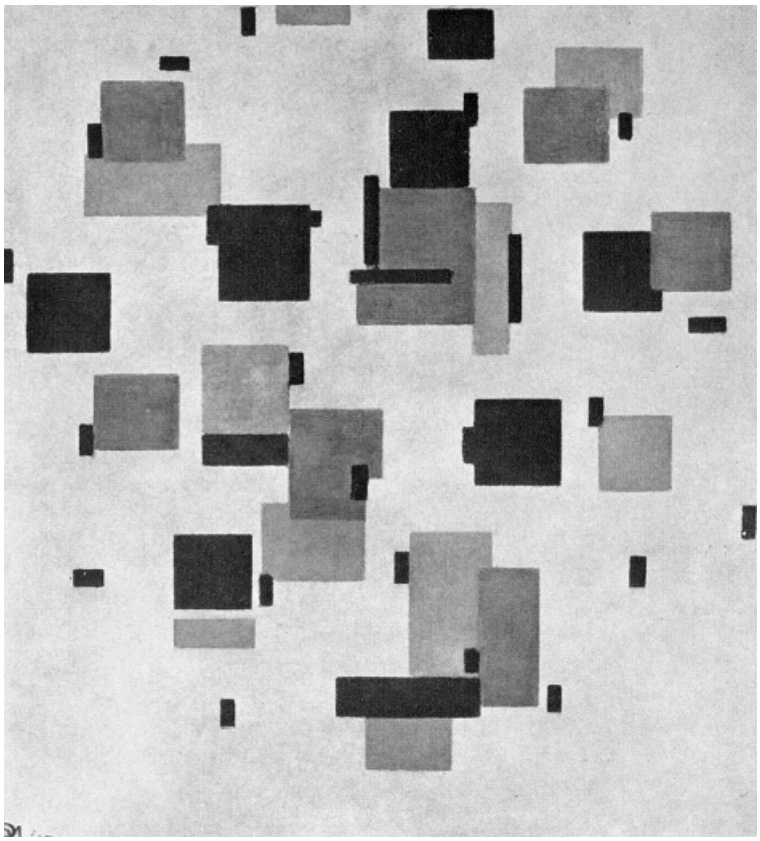
11 Van Doesburg 1916



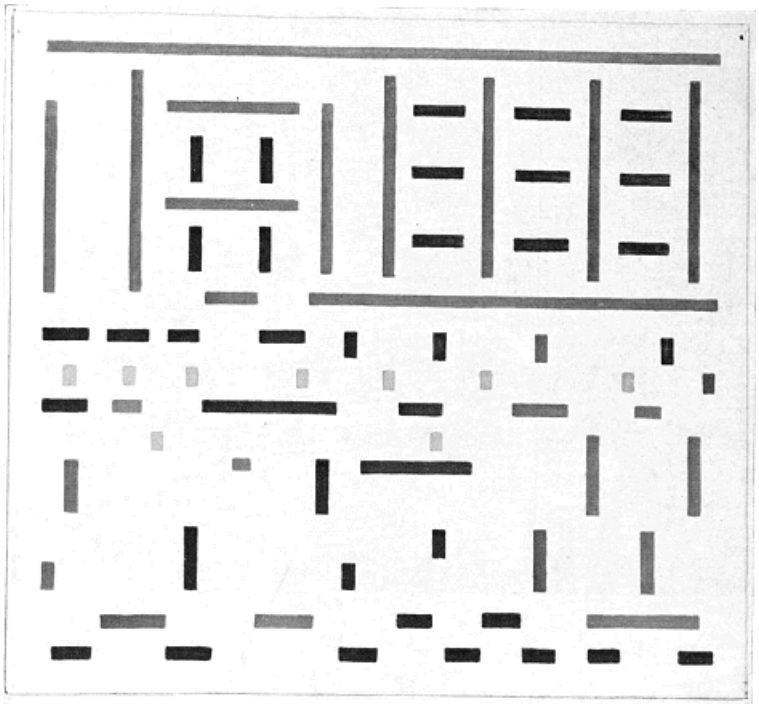
12 Mondriaan 1917



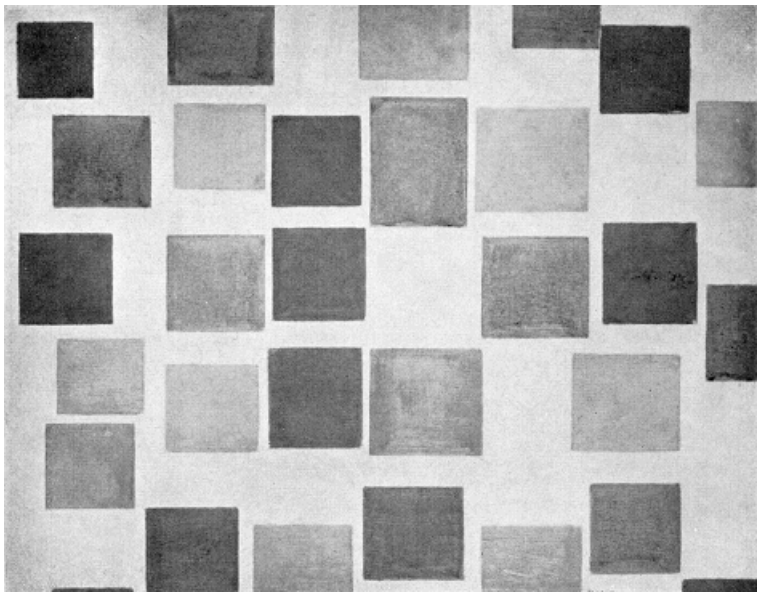
13 Van Doesburg 1918



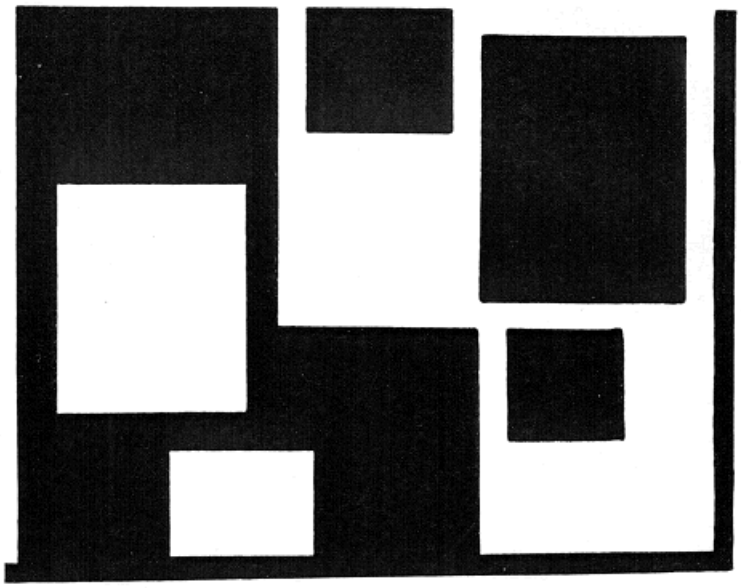
14 Mondriaan 1917



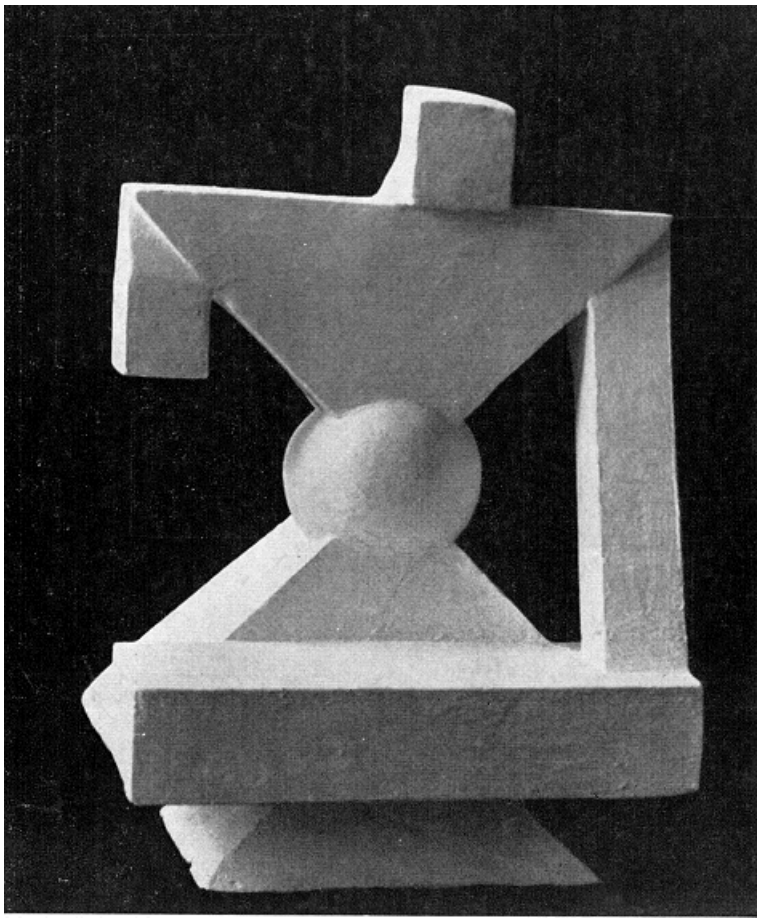
15 Van der Leck 1917



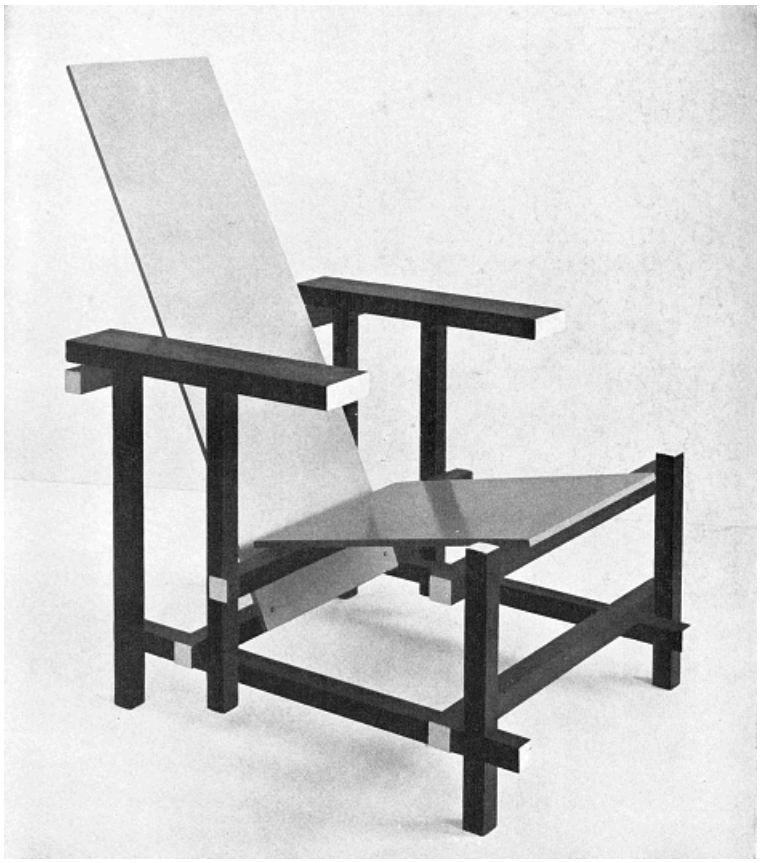
16 Mondriaan 1917



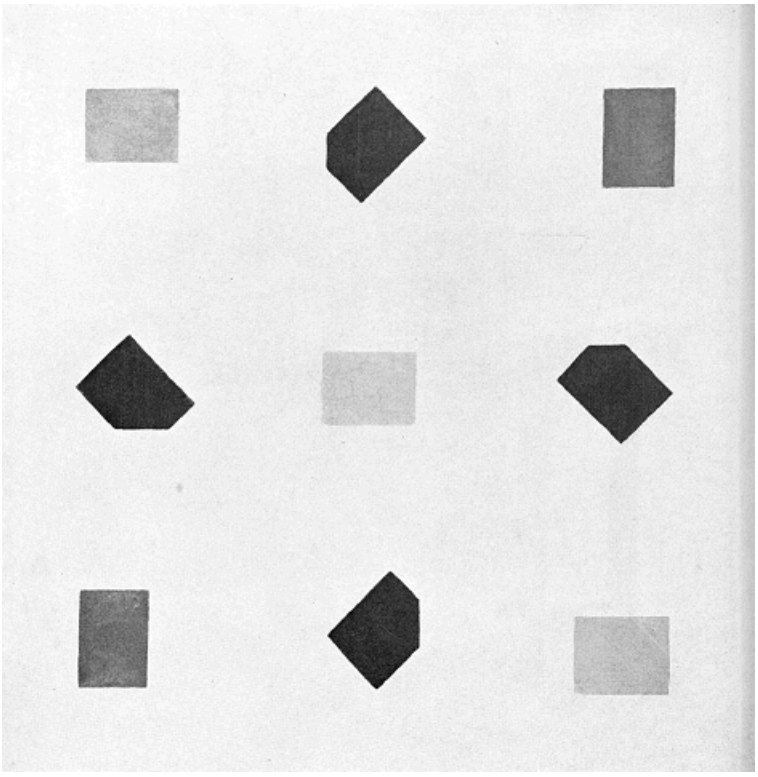
17 Huszar: lino cut 1917



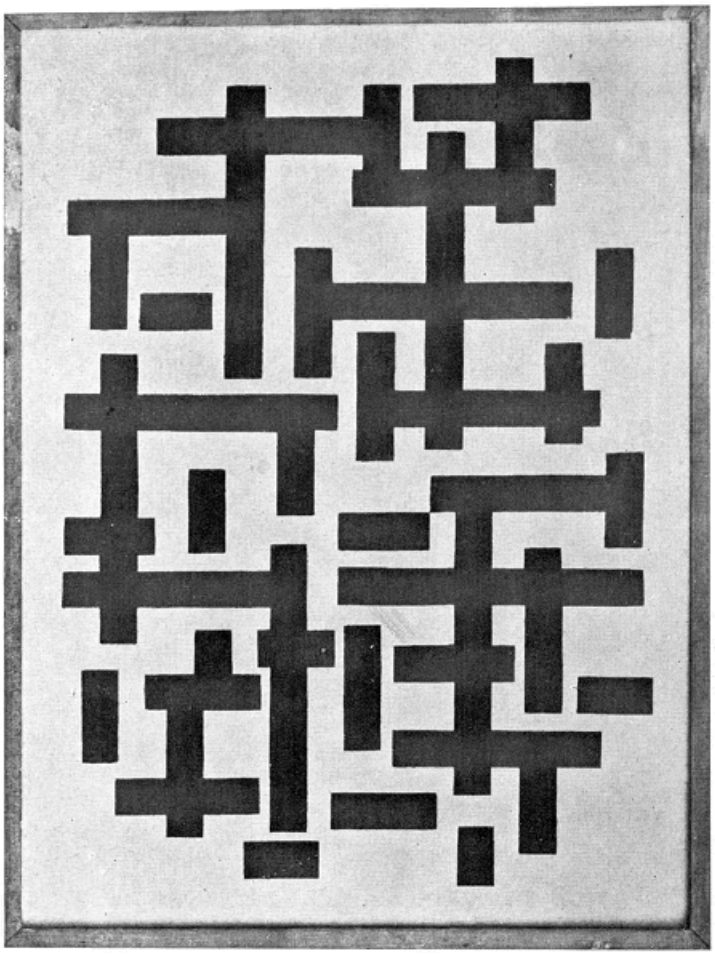
18 Vantongerloo 1917



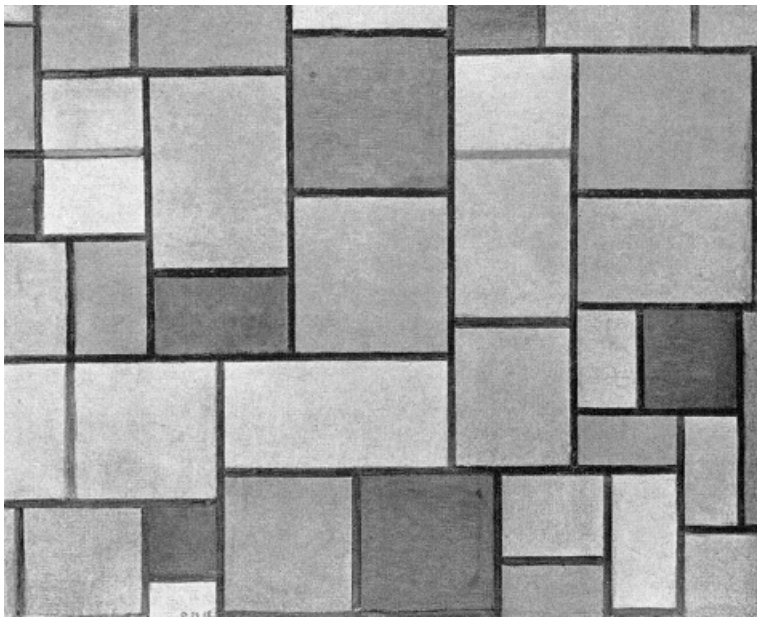
19 Rietveld: chair 1917



20 Van der Leck 1918



21 Van Doesburg 1918



22 Mondriaan 1918

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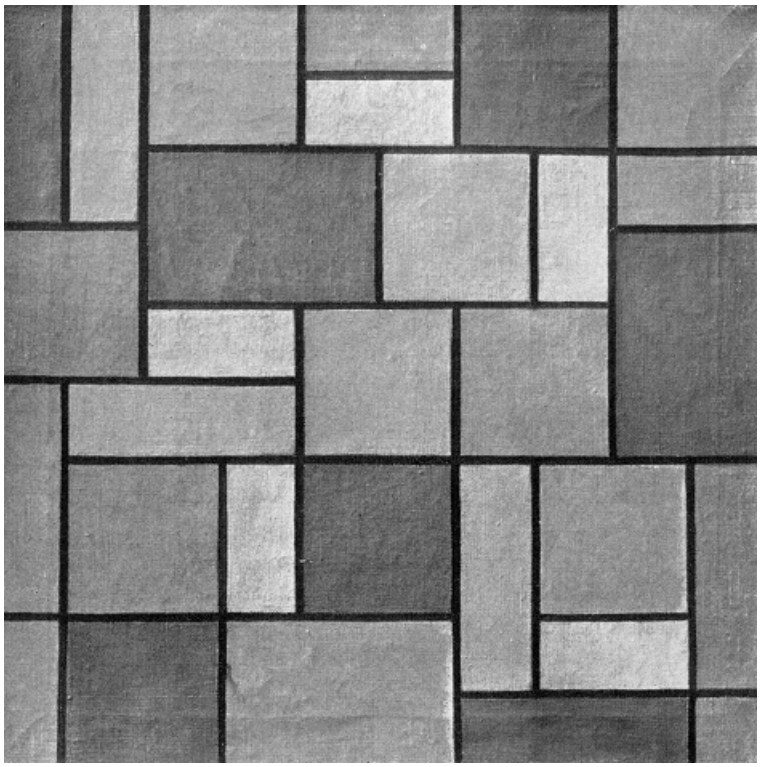
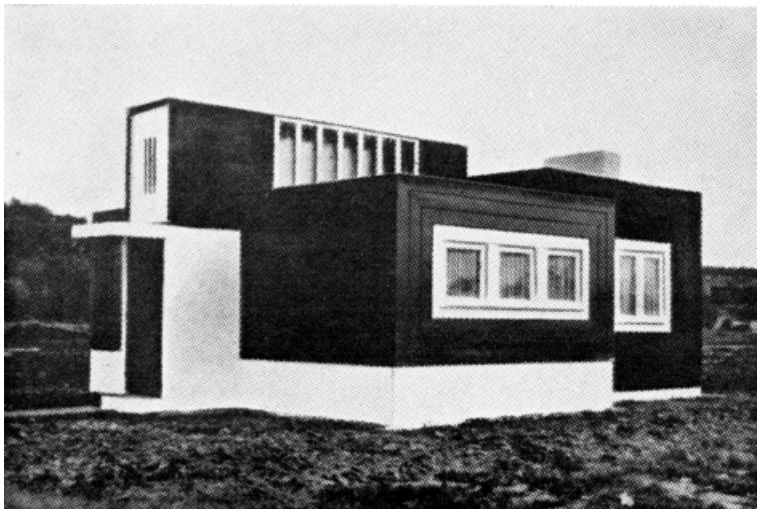
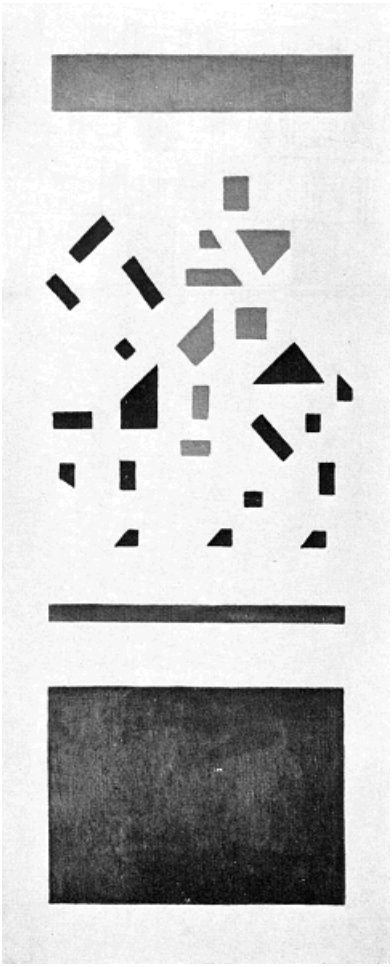


23 Van Doesburg 1919

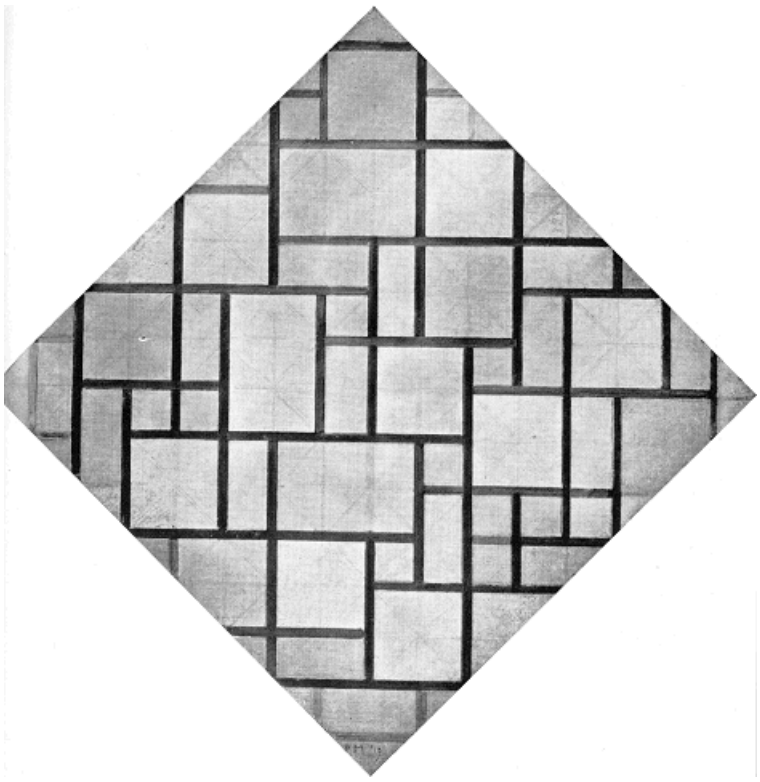


24 Oud: drawing for an esplanade 1917;

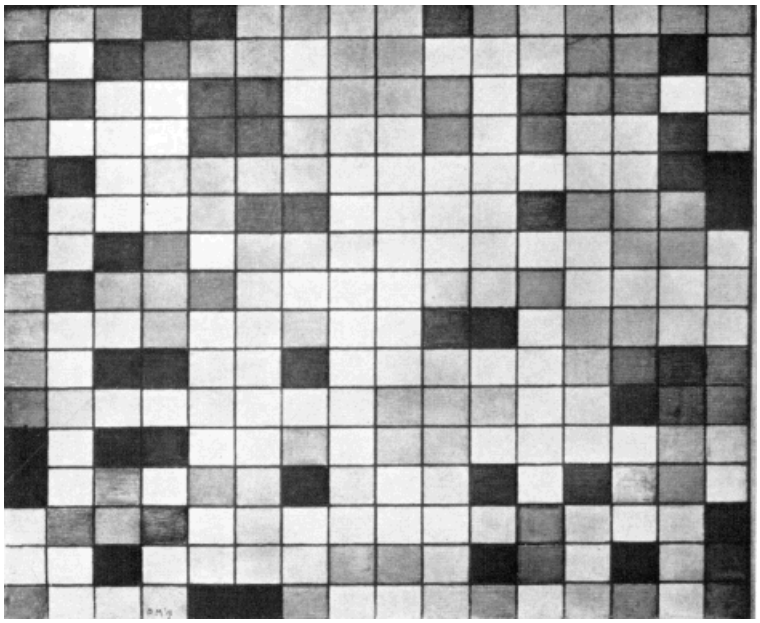
25 Oud: building works office, 1923



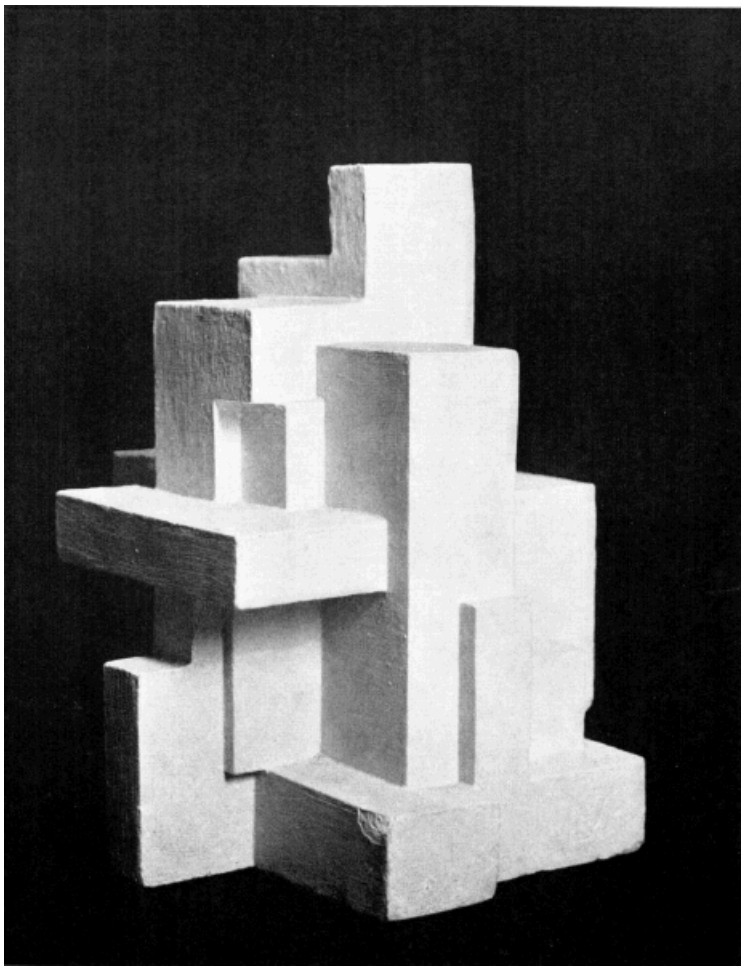
26 Van der Leck 1919



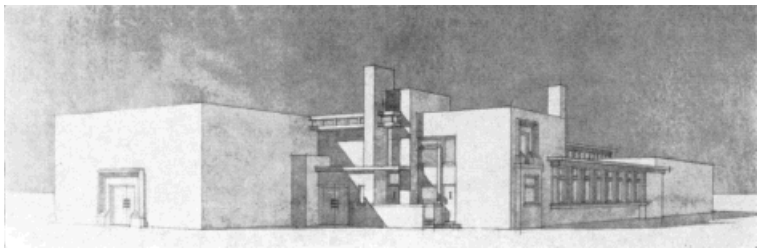
27 Mondriaan 1919



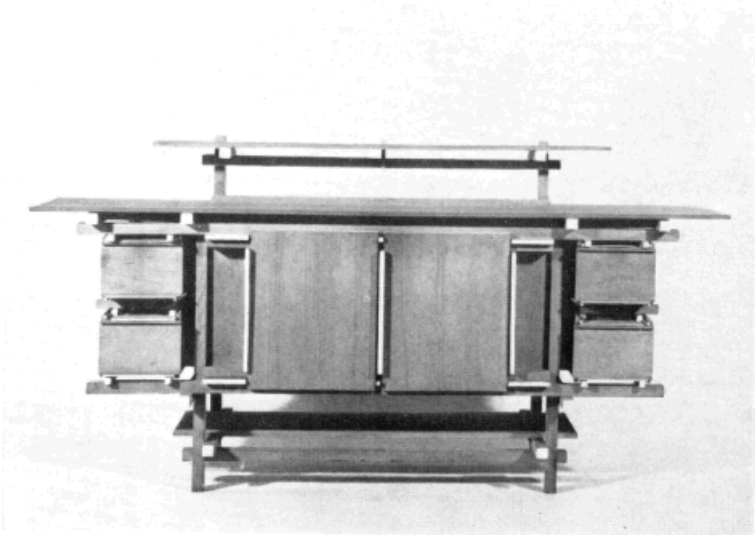
28 Mondriaan 1919



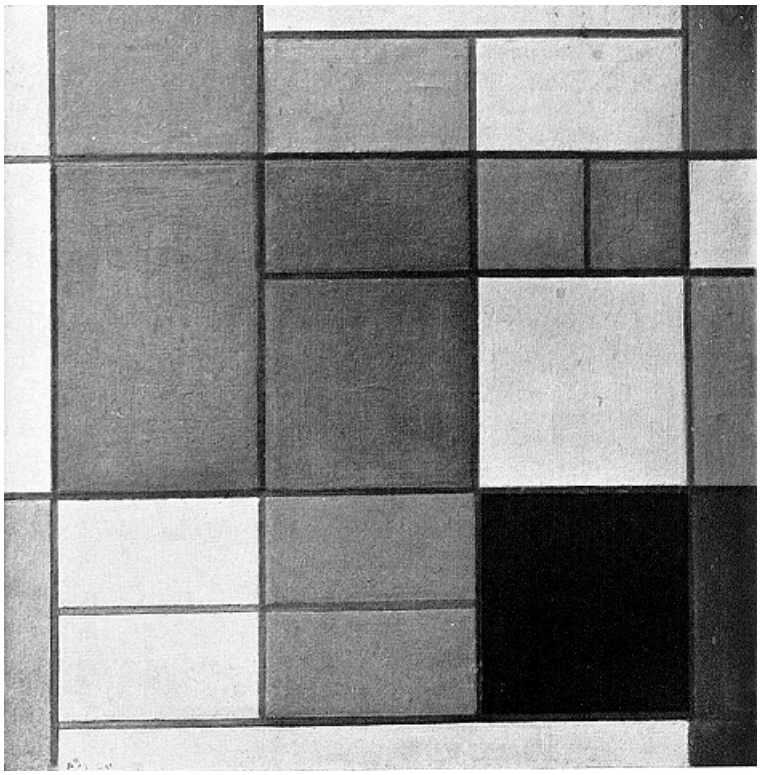
29 Vantongerloo 1919



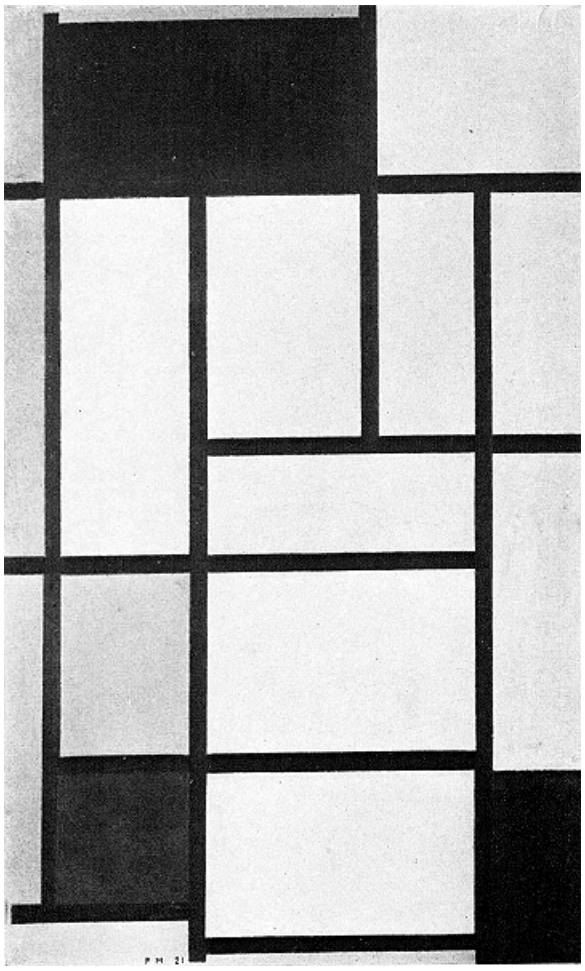
30 Oud: drawing for a factory



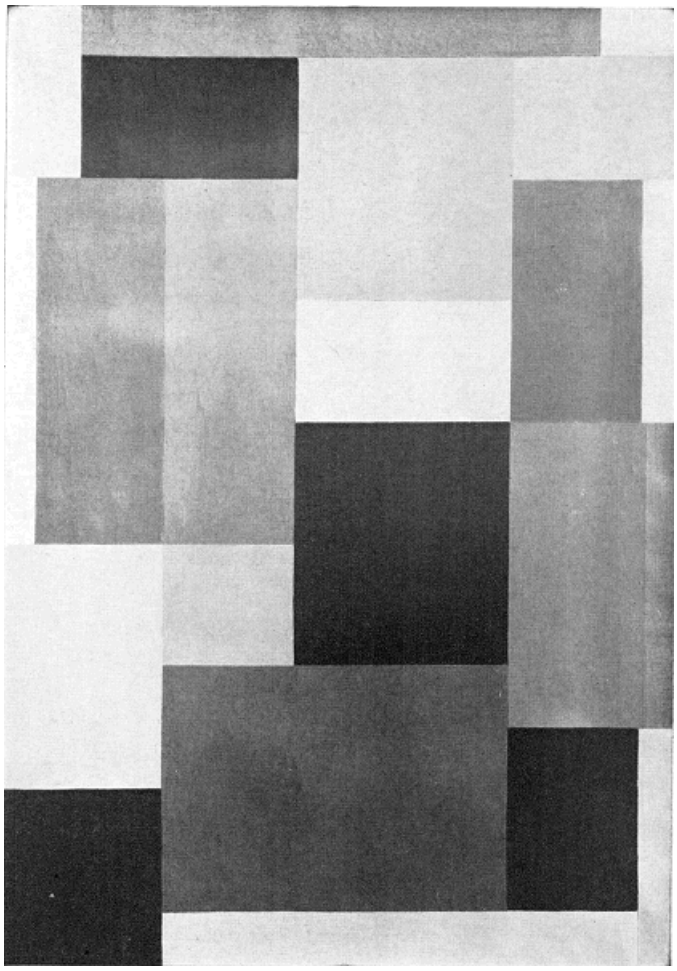
31 Rietveld: sideboard 1919



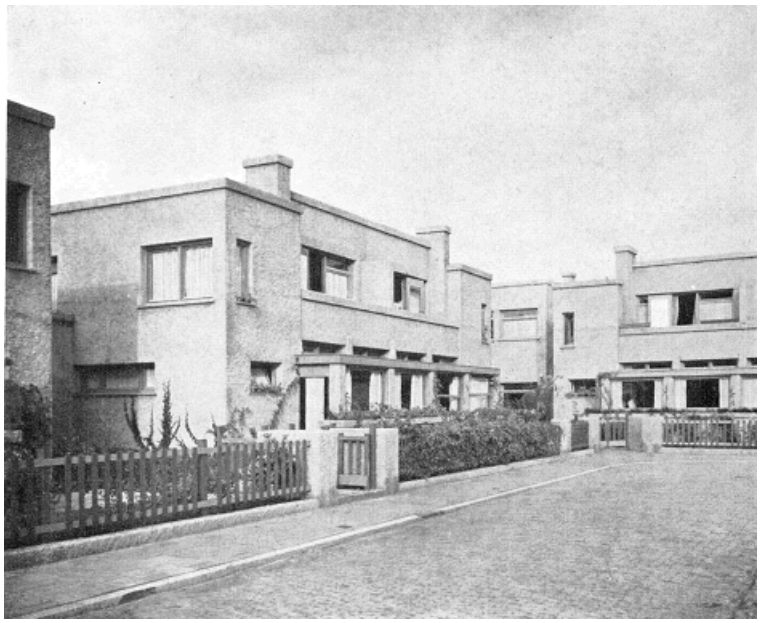
32 Mondriaan 1920



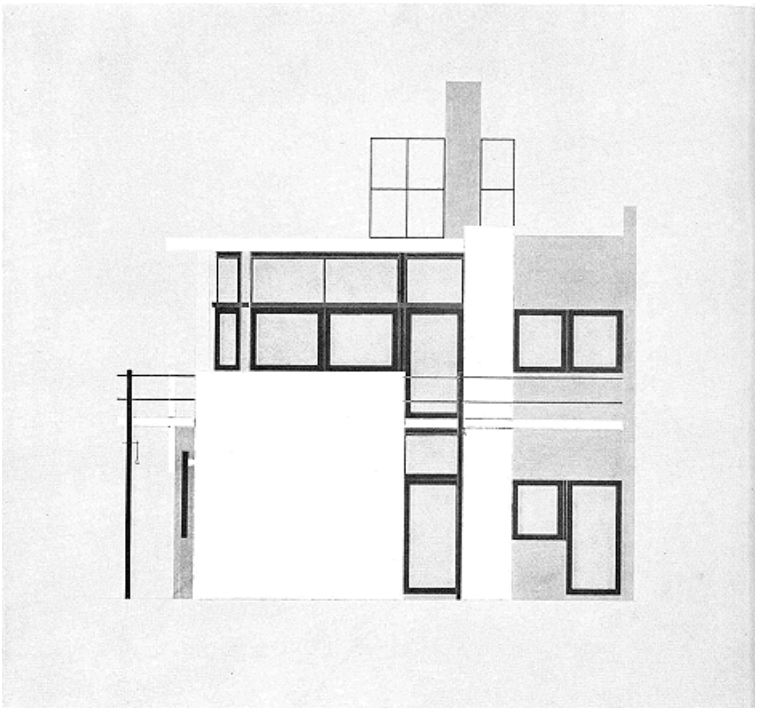
33 Mondriaan 1921



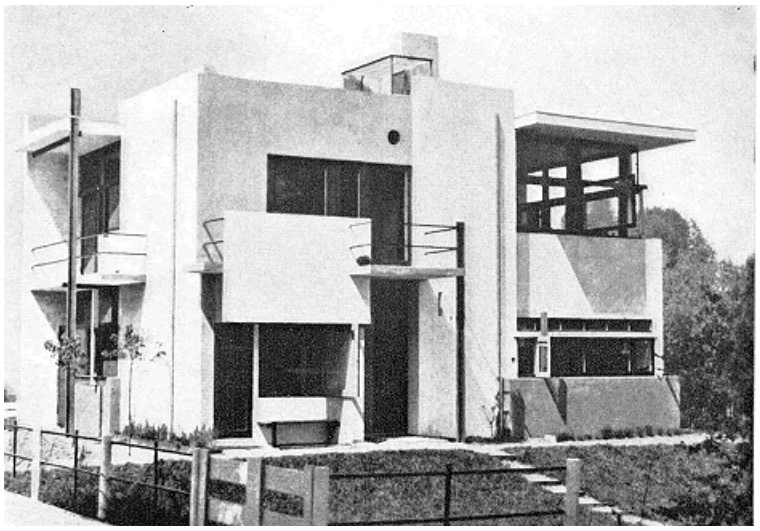
34 Van Doesburg 1921



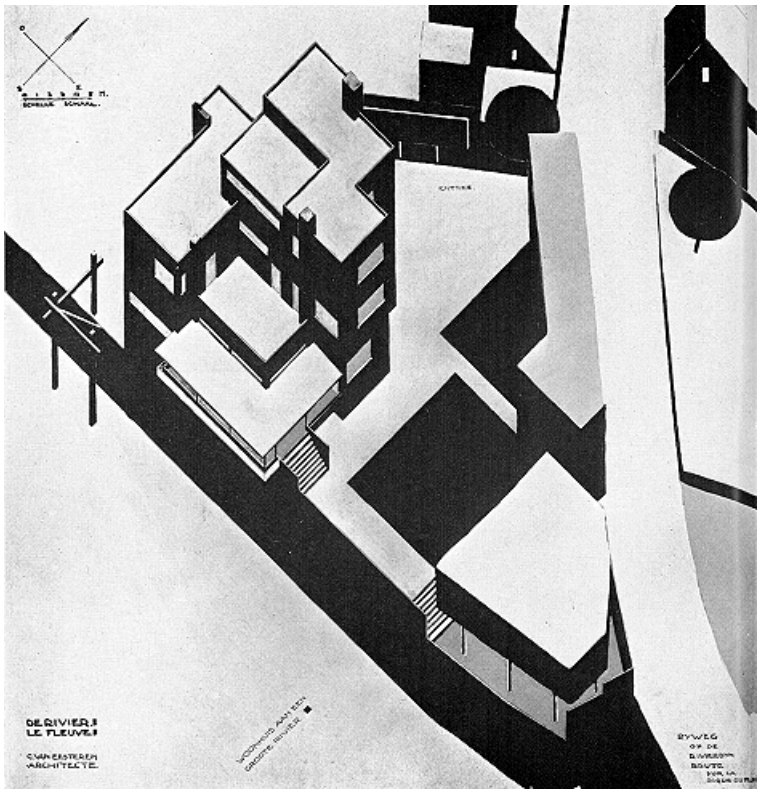
35 Wils: Papaverhof 1920



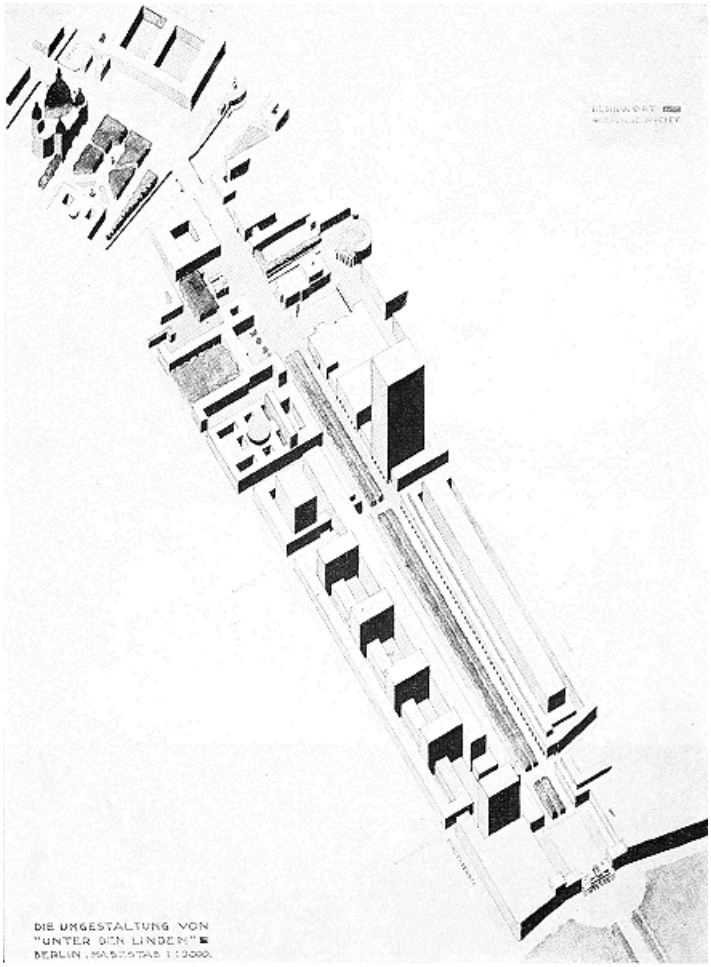
36 Rietveld: plan for a house 1923/1924



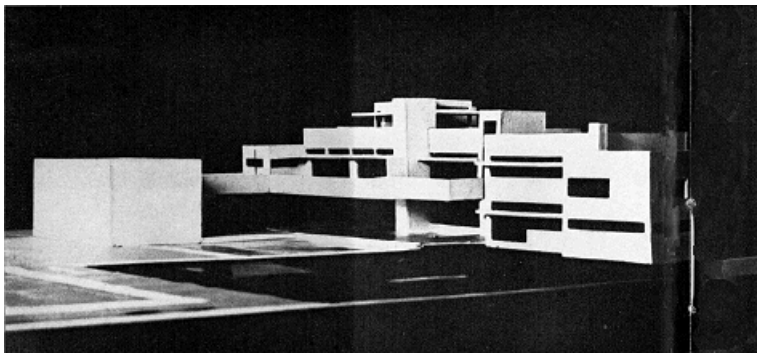
37 Rietveld: the Schröder house 1924



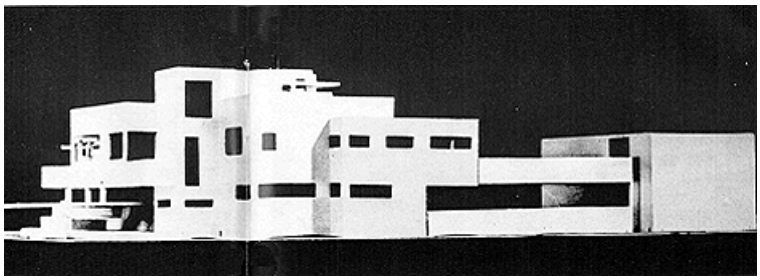
38 Van Eesteren: plan for a house on the river 1923



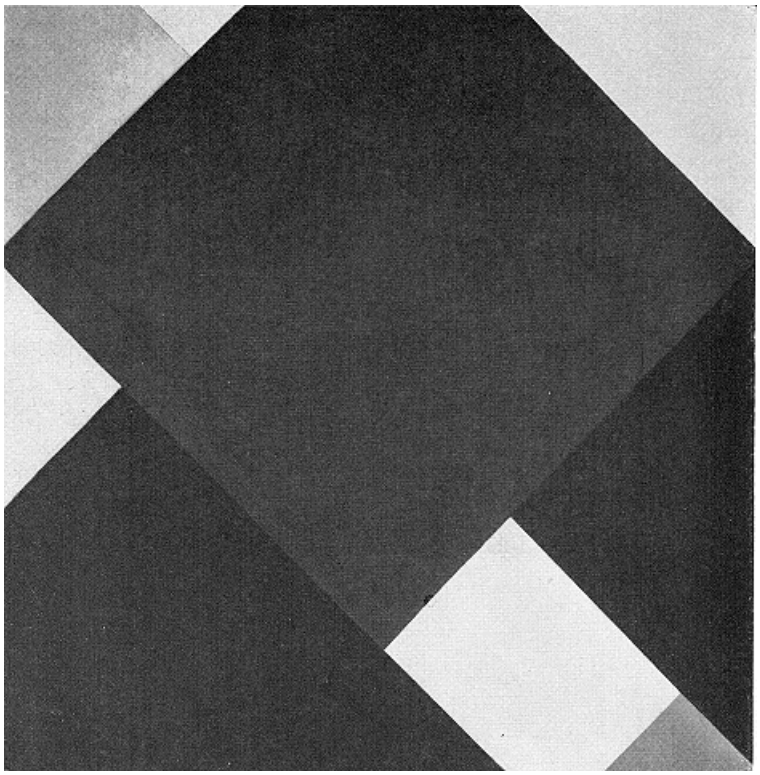
39 Van Eesteren: project for Unter den Linden, Berlin 1923



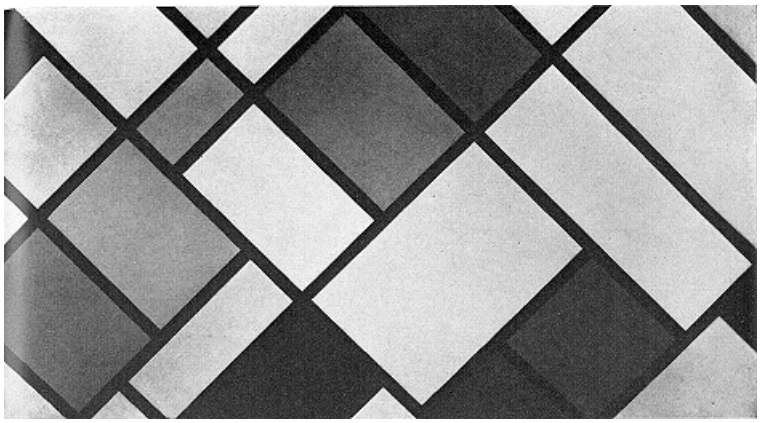
40/41 Van Doesburg and Van Eesteren: model for a private dwelling house 1923/1924



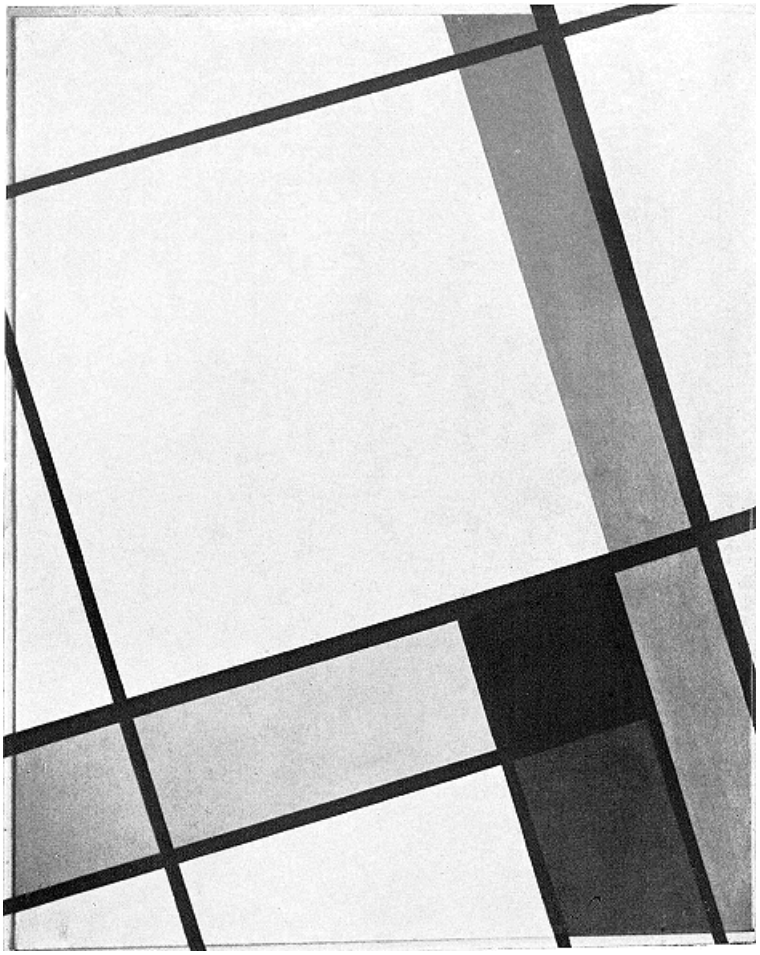
40/41 Van Doesburg and Van Eesteren: model for a private dwelling house 1923/1924



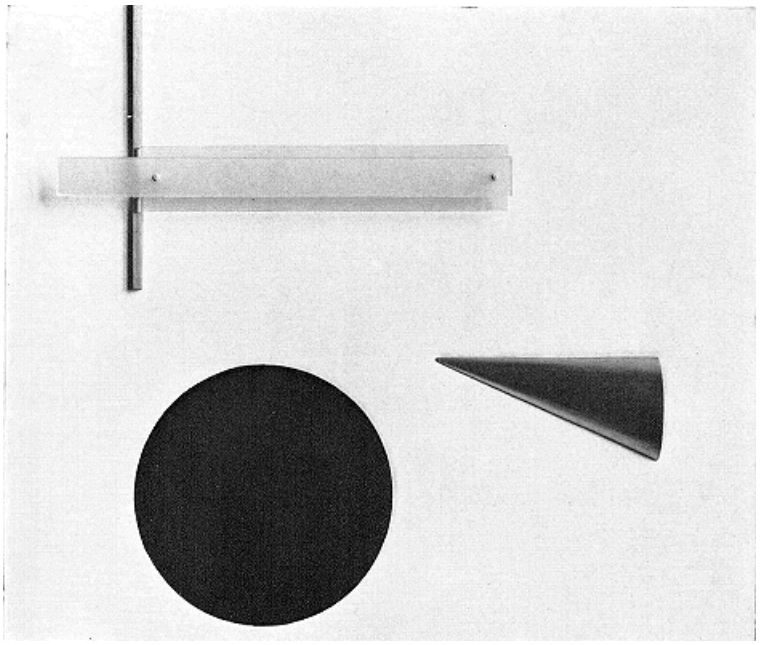
42 Van Doesburg 1924



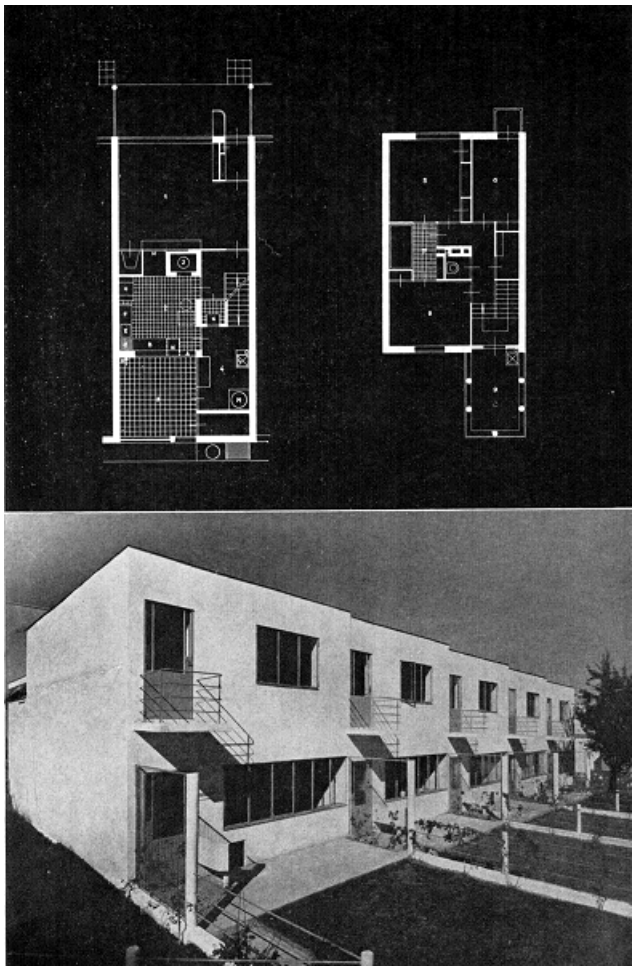
43 Van Doesburg 1925



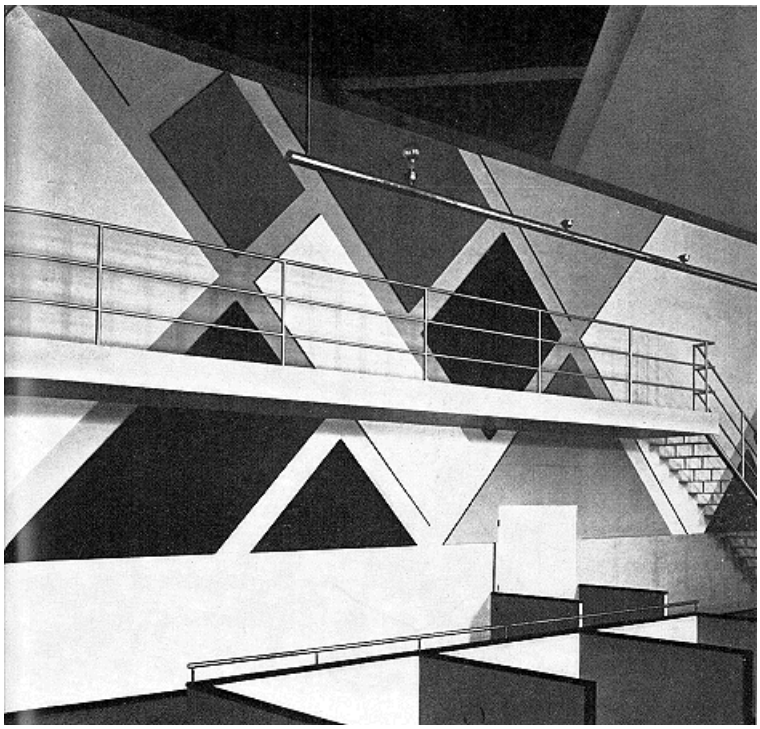
44 Domela 1926



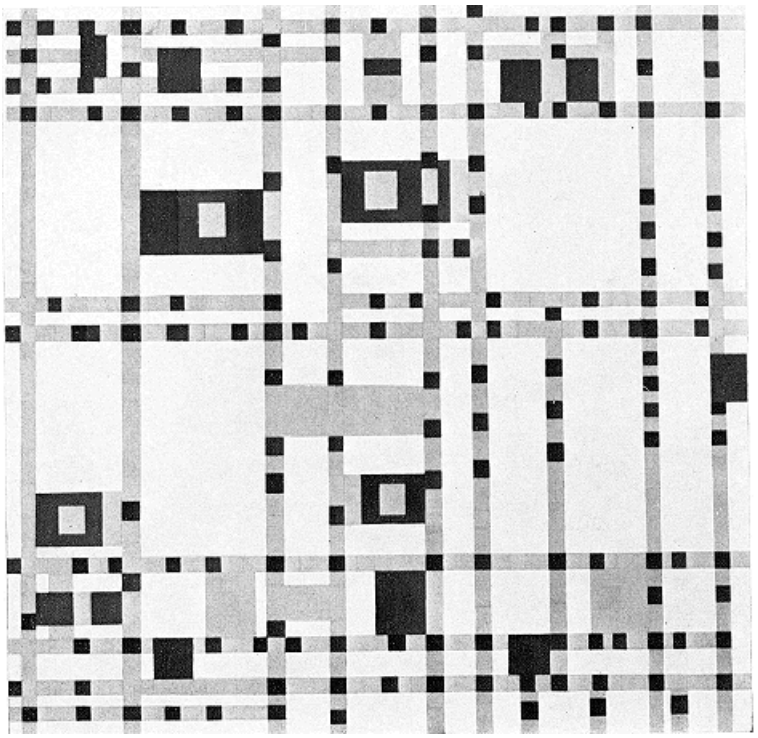
45 Vordemberge-Gildewart 1924



46 Oud: Weissenhof settlement Stuttgart 1927



47 Van Doesburg: Aubette, Strasbourg 1928



48 Mondriaan: Broadway boogie-woogie 1942

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G. Antheil
H. Arp
H. Ball
I.K. Bonset (Theo van Doesburg)
C. Brancusi
A. Camini (Theo van Doesburg)
Th. van Doesburg
C. Domela
C. van Eesteren
W. Graeff
R. van 't Hoff
V. Huszar
F. Kiesler
A. Kok
B. van der Leck
El Lissitzky
P. Mondriaan
J.J.P. Oud
H. Richter
G. Rietveld
T. Schröder-Schräder
G. Severini
G. Vantongerloo
F. Vordemberge-Gildewart
J. Wils

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J. (Hans) Arp

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Mondriaan and others.
Shorthand records of all conferences and seminars from 1916-1931.
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Albums of photos and plans for architectural work including l'Aubette.
Book of Cartoons (showing working methods)
Collected unpublished and published architectural papers (unsorted).
Manuscript on Theory of Colour.
Manuscripts of Miscel. Lectures.
Original manuscripts of most published articles.
These and all other items are in the possession of Mme. van Doesburg at
Meudon, Paris

Cesar Domela

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Stellingen

1

Een wetenschappelijk onderzoek der moderne kunst - zoals K. Malevitch dat voor de kunst van zijn tijd eist - is voor de kunst der laatste 50 jaren nog steeds nodig en wenselijk.
(K. Malevitch, *Die gegenstandslose Welt*,
Bauhausbuch nr. 11, 1927, München, pg. 9-16)

2

De stichting van een archief van ‘De Stijl’ is in Nederland wenselijk en - met de steun van de medewerkers en van de overheid - thans nog te verwezenlijken. De verspreiding der documenten, ‘De Stijl’ betreffend, toont eens te meer de noodzaak om de algemene documentatie van beeldende kunst systematisch voort te zetten en bij te houden tot en met de hedendaagse kunst.

3

In het late werk van Claude Monet zijn elementen aanwezig, die als preludium der abstracte kunst mogen worden beschouwd.

4

In het werk van Vincent van Gogh zijn herhalingen van een zelfde thema volgens de zelfde compositie bekend. Tot hun determinatie dient te worden uitgegaan van de zinsnede uit zijn brieven (br. 605): Mais lorsqu'on reprend après un temps cette étude et qu'on arrange ses coups de brosse dans le sens des objets - certes c'est plus harmonieux et agréable à voir et on y ajoute ce qu'on a de sérénité et de sourire.
(*Verzamelde brieven van Vincent van Gogh*,
1953, Amsterdam-Antwerpen, dl III pg. 457)

5

De ontwikkeling der fotografie heeft in belangrijke mate bijgedragen tot het ontstaan der ‘nonfiguratieve’ kunst.

6

Door toepassing der moderne museografische principes in een daarvoor geschikt gebouw zou de collectie van het Allard-Pierson-Museum vele stadgenoten tot begrip en genieting der antieke beschaving kunnen brengen.

7

Het zou wenselijk zijn in het Nederlandse moderne kunstleven de kunst-criticus in een zelfde mate medezeggenschap te verlenen, als zulks in het buitenland geschiedt.

8

Aangenomen dat de contraprestatie-regeling een eerste stap op de weg van sociale rechtvaardigheid tegenover de kunstenaar ware, schijnt de thans toegepaste procedure nog steeds niet de erkenning in te houden van de positie der kunstenaars in de maatschappij.

9

De zuinigheid, als traditioneel Frans kenmerk getypeerd door Baudet, is in verband te brengen met historische feiten: de eeuwenlange, stelselmatige beroving van het individu door de staat.

(H. Baudet, *Mijn dorp in Frankrijk*, 1955, Assen, pg. 26)

10

In afwijking van Huizinga's mening, die bij de groei der XVIIde eeuwse Nederlandse schilderkunst het accent legt op de ‘vaardigheid der hand’ of op een ‘picturaal laisser-aller’, dient deze groei vooral te worden verklaard uit het streven naar verkenning en uitbeelding van een nieuw verworven werkelijkheid. De Nederlandse tekening der XVIIde eeuw kan tot bewijs van deze opvatting worden aangevoerd.

(J. Huizinga, *Holländische Kultur des siebzehnten Jahrhunderts*,
1933, Jena, pg. 48/49)

11

De parallellen tussen het manierisme en de hedendaagse kunst door R. van Lutterveld in zijn inleiding tot de catalogus ‘Triomf van het Manierisme’ aangetoond, kunnen ook in het historisch verloop worden gestaafd door structurele overeenkomsten tussen het werk van Greco en dat van moderne schilders als Kokoschka en Soutine.

(R. van Lutterveld, Inleiding tot de catalogus
De triomf van het Manierisme,
1955, Amsterdam, pg. 15)

12

Een geschiedenis van de fonteinen en waterwerken in Europa, door de eeuwen, zou de stijlontwikkeling der kunst in verschillende landen en eeuwen met grote duidelijkheid doen uitkomen.

13

De persoon van Keizer Frederik II - en zijn gedachtenwereld - verdient een beschouwing als voorloper van de uomo universale, en zijn tijdperk als voorbode der Renaissance.

14

De cistercienser architectuur vertoont - ondanks haar essentiële uniformiteit - toch belangrijke plaatselijke varianten. Deze afwijkingen van het algemene schema - die een inzicht kunnen geven in de plaatselijke stijltradities - worden thans ten onrechte ontkend of worden in algemene beschouwingen niet voldoende behandeld.
(G. Fillement, *Cloitres et Abbayes de France*, 1950, Paris, pg. 16)

15

De stijl der vazen van Kertsch is, ondanks de vaak hoge kwaliteit der specimina (gids A.P.M. nrs. 1426, 1428) - door de overheersing der picturale principes en de veronachtzaming van het vlak - vreemd aan ons hedendaags kunstgevoel.

16

De tempel van Apollo te Phigalia (Bassae) mag worden beschouwd als het centrale monument van het antieke manierisme, waarop Dvořak's omschrijving van deze artistieke stroming ten volle van toepassing is.